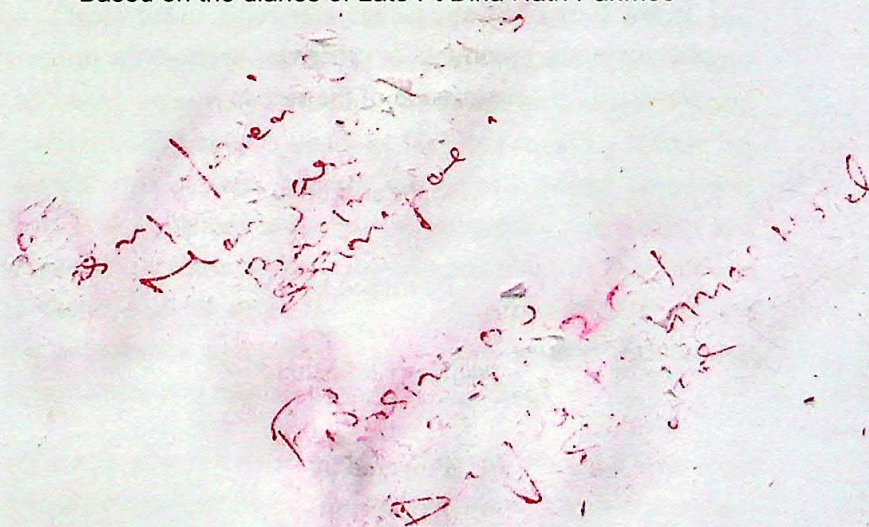


Kashmiriyat at Crossroads

The search for a destiny

Based on the diaries of Late Pt Dina Nath Parimoo



Written by

P P a r i m o o

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Introduction of Authors

This book is written by P Parimoo and is based on the diaries of his father, the late Pandit Dina Nath Parimoo.

Pt Dina Nath Parimoo was born in Srinagar on July 1, 1911 and lived in Kashmir till he retired at the age of 58.

He was an educationist working with the Jammu and Kashmir government and was posted at various locations across the State during the tenure of his service, including Leh, Kargil, Udhampur, Poonch, R S Pura and his favourite Badgam district, where he spent several years as District Education Officer. He was a person of sharp intellect and an able orator, writer and poet. These qualities brought him recognition, admiration and respect from some of the most famous poets and politicians of Kashmir of his time. He thus had earned their trust and the opportunity to interact closely with several well known personalities and opinion makers of Kashmir.

The pen was his most important asset. He was frequently invited to speak on Radio Kashmir and his articles were eagerly sought for magazines and events commemorating dignitaries of Kashmir, poets like Azad, Mahjoor, spiritualists like Master Zind Kaul, and Pt Gopi Kishen, even after his retirement, when he was staying in Mumbai or Ahmedabad. He remained quite active even in Ahmedabad, getting involved with its politics, the Peace council and Urdu mushairas and majlis.

Pt D N Parimoo was an individualistic person with strong views and opinions very often at variance with the views held by the conservative society he lived in. After his retirement he moved to Mumbai where his younger son was based and later, he shifted to Ahmedabad to live with his elder son, P Parimoo, the editor and co-author of this book. At the request of his elder son, Pt D N Parimoo in the year 1994 started writing his diaries about his experiences of life in Kashmir.

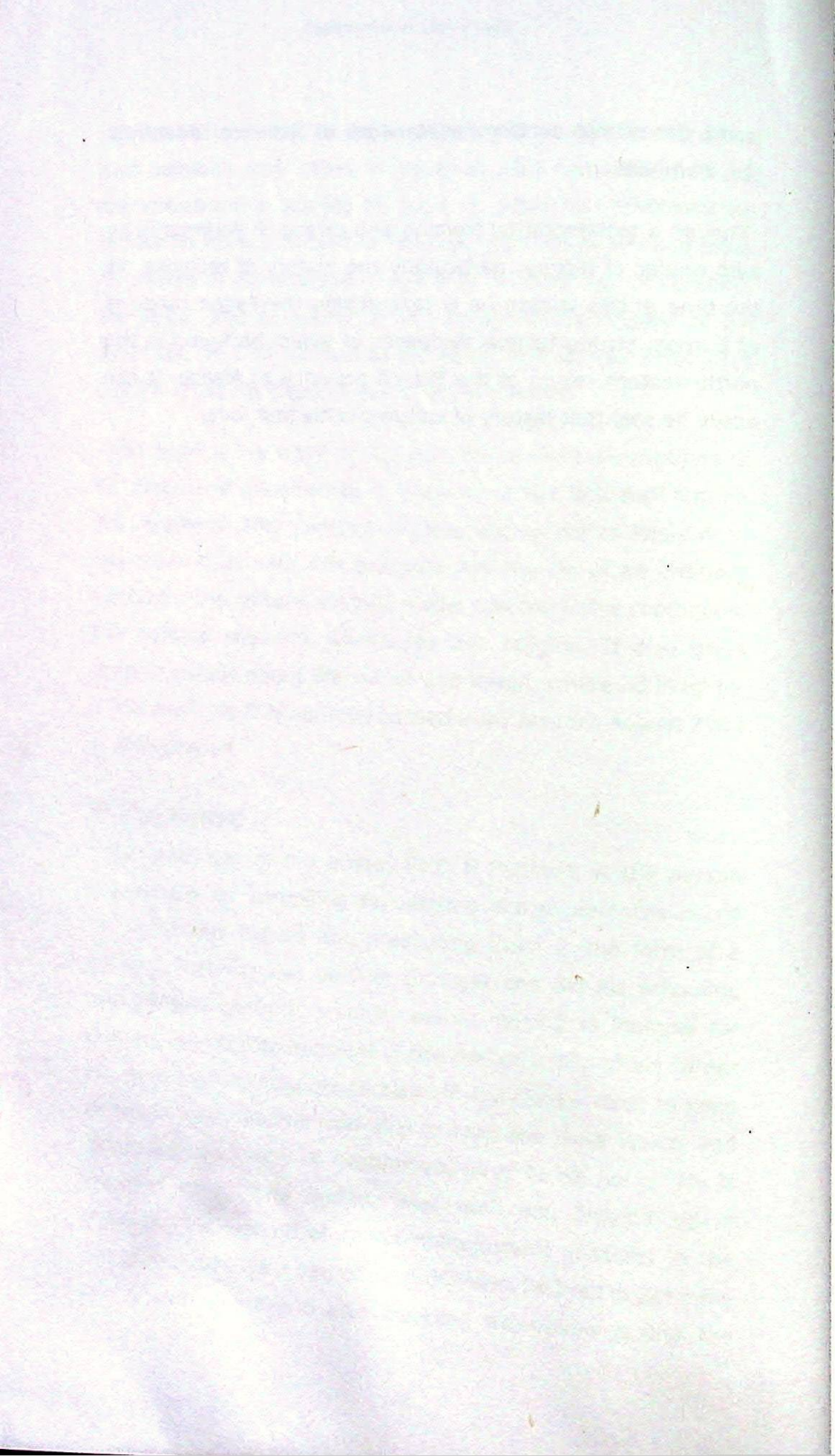
This book is his story of Kashmir, full of vivid descriptions of his first-hand experiences in Kashmir in the first half and till the middle of 20th century. It takes the reader to Kashmir in the olden days with rich glimpses into the life of an ordinary Kashmiri, the culture, history, social and economic conditions, the political scenario, spirituality and religion. It also gives graphic details about life in Leh and Kargil, where he lived for a few years. Pt.D.N.Parimoo passed away on 15th August 2002 in Ahmedabad.

P Parimoo

P Parimoo, son of the author Pt D N Parimoo, is the person responsible for compiling his father's rich experiences noted in his various diaries and presenting them in the form of a book. P Parimoo was born in Srinagar and did his schooling and graduation from Srinagar before moving to Mumbai for training as a textile engineer. Since the beginning of his career he remained mostly outside Kashmir but did his most to keep in touch with Kashmir and also to keep the more logical and appealing traditions of *Kashmiriyat* alive in his home .He is married to Krishna Badam, also born and brought up in Srinagar. He worked at senior management positions in the Indian industry. As a part of his profession, he lived in Germany for several years and also travelled extensively across the

world. He retired as General Manager of Reliance Industries Ltd, Ahmedabad.

Though a technocrat by training and calling, P Parimoo is an avid reader of history, particularly the history of religions. At the time of this writing he is researching the Pagan religions of Europe, strong telltale evidences of which he found in the north-western region of the French province of Alsace. It can easily be said that history of cultures is his first love.



In memory of my parents, Pt. Dina Nath Parimoo and
Smt. Roopa Parimoo

This book is a humble homage to the memory of my
late mentor Shri Dhirubhai H.Ambani,
who always savoured the nostalgic memories
of his Jonga trip to Ladakh.

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Author's Note

The language and communication expert, Late Mrs Aasha Verma, retired senior professor of English language and literature, has made extraordinary contribution to the writing of this book and was closely involved in making this book a reality.

The author acknowledges the painstaking efforts of his brother-in-law, Mr Bhushan Lal Jangi , retired Deputy Director General, Geological Survey of India. His attention to the minutest detail and nuances made an enormous difference to the qualitative aspect of this book.

Mrs Ingrid Braband, who works as a teachers' trainer in Germany and lives in the quiet town of Bendorf on the river Rhine, has been giving useful suggestions regarding the content and arrangement of the text. Her efforts have made it possible to make the book interesting for international readership.

Lastly the author wishes to put on record the tireless efforts put in by his daughter Seema Parimoo Mehta, who spared no efforts to collect the innumerable pieces of important and relevant information from her grandfather Pt Dina Nath Parimoo's diaries, researching the project from several sources and helping the data to be aligned in proper perspective.

P Parimoo
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Genesis: And the Lord created a Paradise called Kashmir

The region of Kashmir valley, claimed to have been swallowed several times by the seas and thrown up again by the revolting forces of nature is a story, fascinating in substance that conforms to both the folklore and the scientific studies by geologists.

Mighty earth movements less than a million years back, caused cracks to this comparatively weak gap in the mountains surrounding the lake of Kashmir, allowing the lake waters to flow out but preserving the river bed, which forms the great reservoir of alluvial soil of the fertile Kashmir valley.

Man is supposed to have appeared here about a quarter of a million years back, probably living on the upper reaches of the surrounding hills with a dense forest cover. Remains of the early human handiwork have been found from a cave in Lolab and elsewhere too, near the lake Wular and indicate human settlement nearly 250000 years old. Gradually man seemed to have made his way up the valleys of Punjab rivers and the Jhelum valley into Kashmir, establishing himself there when the great lake reverently referred to as Satisar had drained and dried itself into a lovely valley. According to a Hindu legend

a *rishi* (saint) by the name of Kashyap ordered the gods and demons to clear the lake for human habitation and it is he who organised and pioneered a culture a Brahmanic society in this valley. The name Kashmir has been possibly derived from this *rishi*, Kashyap.

Some experts have opined that the name Kashmir is derived from Kashuf Mir, the Muslim name for Kussyapa of Hindu history, who at the command of Solomon drained the valley of its waters. Both these versions are surprisingly similar to the scientific account of the birth of Kashmir except that King Solomon according to historians never visited Kashmir.

In *Babar Nama*, though Babar never visited Kashmir, a mention is made about a hill country inhabited by a people called Kas. Kas could be the short form for Koshur or Kashir as we Kashmiris call ourselves and Kasheer is how we call our valley.

The valley as we see it today was far from what it looks now. It was a lake of mammoth proportions, populated by mysterious aquatic creatures that are reluctantly yielding their secrets to geologists by way of fossils found at many places in the valley.

The lake as already stated above was surrounded by mighty mountains except at one place where there is a gap in the mountain barrier. This gap is at the northwest end where Vitasta, the Jhelum river, flows out through a narrow opening near the town of Baramulla. It then roars into the wilderness and on to the plains of Pakistan, where it meets Indus and both finally end their journey and lose their identity in Arabian Sea.

The geography of Kashmir is greatly shaped by river Jhelum which roughly divides the valley into two unequal parts and

also by the mountains that surround Kashmir. Oblong in shape about 130 km long and 37 km to 30 km wide the valley is located at an altitude of 5,200 feet above sea level. The mountain ridges surrounding the valley widely vary in height. On the southern side is the Pir Panjal range varying in height from 8,000 to 15,000 feet. Not so long back the Pir Panjal range was blessed with dense forests, but now most of the trees here have fallen prey to the greedy axe of man. On the northern side stand the great Himalayan range of mountains towering in height up to even 18,000 feet; the major peaks remain covered with snow round the year.

It has been a strange propensity of ancient Hindus all over India, not to document the events, even the major ones, happening in their lands. This ancient tendency of not maintaining an authentic well-documented history has definitely done our society disservice of great proportions by depriving the successive generations of valuable rare knowledge. Some learned man has said:

“Men who don’t learn from history, never cease to be children”

The earliest and the only book on ancient history of Kashmir is *Raj Tarangini* which was written by the Brahmin Kalhana sometime in the middle of 12th century AD. Kalhana has covered the history of Kashmir from 8th century onwards. No other documented accounts of any historical credibility are available for this period.

Gonanda is believed to be the first known king of Kashmir; there are several references to him in *Mahabharata* which means that the Kashmiri society evolved at an early time from a tribal and a nomadic society to a well organised society of sizable population governed by a king. The historically

confirmed references we get are from the time when emperor Ashoka (273 -232 BC) brought Kashmir under his control and promoted his new religious faith of Buddhism amongst the Brahmanic society of Kashmir. He was succeeded by his son Jaluka who asserted himself as an independent king of Kashmir. He was not a zealous Buddhist as his father was, and Brahmanism again staged a revival in Kashmir.

Several kings ruled Kashmir after Jaluka for another 300 years till the Kushan tribes from central Asia conquered vast stretches of land in the northwest and western India.

Buddhism becomes the State religion of Kashmir

Kanishka the most distinguished of Kushans annexed Kashmir to his empire around 1st century AD. Being a committed Buddhist he determinedly worked for spread of this religion all over the world, sending preachers to far off countries to spread the word of Buddhism.

In fact he is credited with having outdone Ashoka in his efforts for the spread of Buddhism.

In Kanishka's time Buddhism became the state religion of Kashmir. Kanishka also held a crucial Conference (the 4th) of Buddhist Sanghas, in Kashmir. This Assembly of Buddhists was held near the present day Harwan in close proximity of the Mughal gardens of Srinagar city. The agenda of this conference organised by King Kanishka was to collect, collate and finalise the fundamental Buddhist principles. The conference also aimed to write a commentary in keeping with the Sarasativadi Buddhist thought.

The three main treatises of Sarasativadi were written at this time. Of these only Mahavibhasha Shasta written in Chinese exists today.

Following the satisfactory conclusion of this conference, Kanishka is believed to have handed over the entire Kashmir valley to the Sangha for building of *viharas* and erection of stupas for propagation of Buddhism in Kashmir and beyond.

This act of Kanishka angered the Brahmins and resulted in friction between the followers of Brahmanism and Buddhism, which lasted for several centuries.

The first organised assault on the Buddhists of Kashmir was undertaken by one Raja Nara. His treatment of Buddhists, reportedly was so severe that the famous Buddhist scholar and preacher Nagarjuna was forced to flee to south India. From here Nagarjuna took the Buddhist philosophy to Sri Lanka where he earned the same status in Buddhist hierarchy as did Padma Sabmhav in the Himalyan countries of Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

Following this, in the 6th century A.D. one Kashmiri king Mihirkula, indulged in a ruthless campaign of destroying *viharas*, *chaitiyas* and *mathas* and harassing Buddhists. Despite this Buddhism managed to survive in Kashmir. Kalhana the great historian has written about Buddhism with great respect and empathy.

Kanishka was followed by two more kings of Kushan dynasty but of little merit.

As the Kushan power in northwestern India was being harried by the Huns, the Kushan Satraps retreated to Saurashtra now in

the state of Gujarat where their descendents lead comfortable lives even today.

The last of the Kashmir based Kushan rulers could not control the upsurge of local rulers who ultimately seized back the power and Brahmanism again asserted its might.

In this frenzy of Brahminic revival several Buddhist *viharas*, the religious and cultural centres of learning are said to have been destroyed as also the monasteries. Shaivism of Brahmins became the new mantra of Kashmir.

Sixth century AD saw the fall of Gupta Empire which had a loose suzerainty over Kashmir and a Hun general seized Kashmir. His extreme cruelty to inhabitants has been his only achievement if it can be called so.

Resurgence of Brahminic rule

The cruel Hun rule didn't last long, for soon the local nobles managed to get back the original Gonanda dynasty to the throne of Kashmir. During this period king Vikramaditya of Ujjain exercised a loose hegemony over Kashmir and it is believed that he may have helped the Kashmiri rebels get rid of the Huns.

When the famous Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang visited Kashmir in 631 AD, King Durlabh Vandhana of the Kashmiri Karkot dynasty was ruling Kashmir. According to Hiuen Tsang's writings, the Kashmir state was very strong by all accounts. The king was tolerant and rather partial to Buddhists. There were about 100 monasteries and about 5,000 Buddhist monks around in Kashmir at that time.

Hieun Tsang was accorded the status of a state guest and was provided with clerks to copy religious texts for him, by the Kashmiri king Durlabhwardhana. While in Kashmir, Hieun Tsang studied the *sutras* and the *shastras* and other Buddhist scriptures.

The most distinguished ruler of Karkot dynasty, however, was the famous Lalitaditya who ruled from 724 to 761 AD. He proved to be a great administrator and a great builder of temples and towns some of which still continue to amaze man even in their present form of ruins, splendid as these ruins are. The prime position of course goes to Martand temple situated in the vicinity of the present township of Mattan. It is believed that at that time there were many artisans of Egyptian, Iraqi, Abyssinian and Greek origin present in Kashmir owing to highly unsettled conditions in their countries because of Arab Muslim conquests, as opposed to the very rewarding disposition of Kashmiris and their king. The prosperity of the land offered chances of high remuneration to these foreign artisans. This could explain the unique architecture of some of the temples including Martand, built in the reign of Lalitaditya. The ruins of this temple strongly suggest Greek and Egyptian influences. Lalitaditya was a conqueror who had expanded his domains to Kathiawar in the west, Bengal in the east, Ladakh in the northwest and also into deep south. He demonstrated his secular thought by extending official protection to Buddhism which was coming under severe attack from Brahmins, as also suffering of progressive decay from within its own society.

This great kings' great dynasty died a slow tragic death by the middle of 9th century AD, owing to gross incompetence of successive generations.

Two Kashmiri women have left an indelible mark on Kashmir's history all because of their beauty combined with their highly perfected art of court intrigues, statecraft and political manipulations. One was called Jaya, who gave a new dynasty called Uptalas to Kashmir, the other was Didda, who called the shots of governance of Kashmir for nearly 50 long years and sowed the seeds of decay and ultimate demise of Hindu rule in Kashmir.

Jaya, who was a poor but a beautiful girl had become a widow at a tender age. The king happened to see her by chance and was fascinated and smitten by her. He brought her to his court only to die suddenly soon after.

The King's son, who succeeded him, also fell to the charms of this woman.

As the favourite courtesan, Jaya used her coquetry, her beauty, her brain and even her body to achieve the ultimate power in Kashmiri court. Though not even a queen she exercised the power of a kingmaker.

The growing influence of Jaya benefited her brothers who soon became collectively a force to reckon with in the court of Kashmir.

This wayward seductress had but one aim and she ultimately achieved it when one of her brother's grandsons became the King heralding a new dynasty of rulers of Kashmir. The king Avantivarman (855-883 AD) a gift of the dying Jaya founded the Uptala dynasty. This is considered the golden period of Kashmir. Development of drainage systems (to avoid destruction by floods) was carried out on a large scale. The conservation of nature we talk of today was a matter of faith

to the king Avantivarman in those bygone times. He banned hunting of birds migrating from the very cold Siberia to places in and around the marshes of Wular lake during the winter months, something undertaken by the present government of Kashmir belatedly.

New towns like Avantipura and Sopore were founded by this king and he built many majestic temples.

The successors of this king however were of poor calibre causing the downfall of this dynasty by 939 AD.

Didda the second powerful woman in the history of Kashmir was a Kashmiri princess by birth. She rose to power after her marriage sometime around 949 AD. It was she and not her husband who governed the state, through many manipulations for nearly 50 years. Much has been written about the beauty and viles of this queen, her debauchery and tyranny mixed with occasional outbursts of great religious piety. But the insatiable lust of Didda could not be totally satisfied by any man, noble or coarse.

A nymphomaniac, she changed her lovers as she changed her moods and there were too many of them. The unfortunate discarded lovers could not be let loose for fear of divulgence of her bedroom secrets. They had to be disposed off in a ghastly variety of ways to prevent any finger of suspicion raised towards the queen. There is no reliable count of her victims, but many they were, each disposed of in some hideous novel way, putting to shame the similar deeds of the Russian Catherine the Great.

The one who survived Didda's bed chamber was a herdsman named Tunga, who got promoted as the army chief by her. He survived, perhaps because she died quickly thereafter.

Didida died in 1003 AD, leaving behind a morally bankrupt court in total disarray. But while on her deathbed she managed to have a minor boy from her original family before her marriage nominated as the successor to the throne. This is how a Lohara, a Khashtriya dynasty came to power first time in Kashmir and that is when the shadow of Mohammed Ghazni the Afghan, plunderer of Hindustan was looming large over Kashmir even though he skipped Kashmir.

The successors of the first Lohara king too were spoilers and losers, one of them even looted temples of their treasures.

The next 200 years were not of any help towards development of Kashmir as it was ruled by insignificant and indolent kings who could contribute little to the greatness of their forbearers. The seeds of rot sown by Didida had come to fruition, the court existed but without a direction or purpose, as if waiting for Mother Nature to decide its fate.

Around 1320 A.D two foreigners, one a Buddhist refugee from Ladakh named Renchen and the other a Muslim nobleman named Shah Mir, came to Kashmir. Both were well received and bestowed with the best of traditional Kashmiri hospitality. The Hindu king of the time bestowed them with *jagirs* (land grants). Renchen was given a *jagir* in Lolab valley and Shah Mir was given one near Baramulla.

In 1320 a Turkish Mongol invaded Kashmir. Kashmiris were not prepared to resist this sort of attack. The king fled and the Mongol army was let loose on the defenceless people. Rape, plunder and arson continued for several days.

With the entire country in disarray, the wily Renchen sensed an opportunity. He allied with Shah Mir and treacherously

murdered Ram Chander who was the prime claimant to the throne. Seizing power, Renchen married Ram Chander's wife Kota Rani and showed great reverence to Hindu gods so as to popularise himself to his subjects. He wished to be accepted as a Hindu. This request of his was unacceptable to the short sighted Brahmins. Frustrated by the attitude of Brahmins and under Shah Mir's influence Renchen accepted Islam and Kashmir had its first Muslim king.

Renchen however died soon after, and Shah Mir, who now had become a very strong personality of the Kashmir court, overcoming a feeble resistance put by Renchen's wife Kota Rani, became the king and this is when the crescent started flying high over Kashmir. Shah Mir was succeeded by his grandson Shihabudin who proved to be a capable ruler, and greatly repaired the long time damage done to the Kashmir economy.

A grandson of Shihabudin, Sikandar, became king of Kashmir (1389-1413). Failing to achieve anything substantial and worthwhile but at the same time eager to be remembered in history, he resorted to forcible conversion to Islam of his poor helpless subjects. Defacement and desecration of ancient priceless monuments and idols became his passion. He tried his best to demolish Martand the priceless heritage of Kashmir. However he could not damage more than the roofs and idols in the walls, and left ruins behind, attractive enough to speak the glory of this ancient marvel. He felt proud to have earned the title he bestowed on himself the title of *Sikandar-but-Shikan*, Sikandar the idol destroyer.

Ironically the executor, the prime perpetrator of his destructive addiction was his chief minister Suh Bhatt, a Kashmiri Pandit

who converted to Islam to secure his official standing and took the name of 'Saif-u-Din'. This opportunist outdid his master in destroying the heritage of his own ancestors and in the massacre of Hindus as well as of the Buddhists that remained.

During this period large droves of Islamic scholars and preachers came to Kashmir from Iran and Afghanistan, the prominent amongst them was Mohammed Hamdani who came with several hundred of his Sayed followers.

The policy of religious bigotry was followed by Sikandar's successor, Ali Shah, under the guidance of the old wily Suh Bhat alias Saif-u- Din. During the rule of the two sultans many temples were razed and mosques built thereupon.

Ali Shah, successor of Sikandar was followed by the messiah of Hindus, 'Sultan Zain ul Aabdin' (1420- 1470 A.D) affectionately called Badshah-Padshah. Soon after ascending to throne Zain ul Aabdin set to revive the broken down economy of the valley. Handicrafts like carpet weaving, copper sheet working, wood carving were introduced and encouraged. All restrictions against Hindus were removed. The country flourished once again and Sultan capped these achievements with some successful military campaigns as well.

Sultan Zain ul Aabdin was succeeded by a string of incapable indolent sultans. The Muslim courtiers like Sayeds, Dars and Chaks were busy manipulating their own positions in the royal court and busy with their own feuds. During this time one of the defeated Mughal generals of Humayun marched towards Kashmir and finding a weak sultanate there, assumed the power in the name of his emperor who himself was on the run having been badly mauled by Sher Shah Suri in the plains of Hindustan. The weak and shaky Mughals soon lost control and

the Kashmir Sultanate again came to the fore even though for only a little period.

When Akbar ascended the throne of Delhi, he consolidated his empire and rescued Kashmir from the anarchy of sultans in 1589 AD. Akbar the Mughal emperor reportedly visited Kashmir thrice. His successors Jahangir and Shah Jahan loved Kashmir and bestowed it with fine examples of Mughal art and architecture. Srinagar city referred to as Shehar e Khaas, till a very recent time, was gifted by nature with a beautiful lake, the Dal Lake. The Mughals developed a string of great gardens around it, that retain their magical beauty till today, namely the Nishat, the Shalimar, the Chashma Shahi, the Pari Mahal and the Nasim.

Death of Aurangzeb was the beginning of the end of Mughal dynasty; each successive emperor became a powerless symbol of the steadily decaying Mughal dynasty. In the era of Shah Alam, grandfather of the last Mughal emperor Zafar, it used to be said by his subjects openly and derisively:

Badshah Shah Alam –Az Delhi ta Palam

(Emperor Shah Alam's rule extended for a few kilometres only, from Lal Kila (the Red Fort) to Palam village, now the site of Indira Gandhi International Airport of Delhi)

This decline of Mughal power in Delhi affected the politics of Kashmir; since the remnants of Sultan dynasties and the Muslim chief courtiers could not come to a compromise they made a blunder of historical magnitude by inviting a known marauder Ahmad Shah Abdali to invade Kashmir. It was like inviting a wolf to the sheep's meadow. The result was predictable, one Afghan governor after another was sent by

Kabul to plunder and squeeze out whatever they could, from the people of Kashmir, rich or poor, Hindu or Musalman. None was spared the most savage and brutal methods of torment and merciless exploitation.

The unabated savagery continued for 70 long years. There was nothing of worth left in Kashmir, people went hungry, migrated to other parts of Indian subcontinent or lived under the most pathetic conditions prevailing in their homeland, Kashmir. Disease and floods took their toll, fields were unattended and orchards abandoned. This is derisively referred to as the Pathan Raj in Kashmir even today. The descendants of the great noble families who had invited the marauder Ahmed Shah Abdali, in time became penniless people themselves. One of the families, the Chaks, resorted to crime as Galwans the highway robbers or keepers of horses. Another family, the Dars, ended as small time vegetable farmers.

Pt Birbal Dhar (Refer Chapter10- Unsung Heroes of Kashmir) a nobleman in the Afghan court could no more tolerate the inhuman rule of Afghans. Accompanied and helped by a few courageous Pandits and Muslims he managed to meet the valiant Maharaja Ranjeet Singh who had already, without any success attacked Kashmir. Briefed by the knowledgeable Pandits about the Afghan army dispositions, Maharaja Ranjeet Singh invaded Kashmir and defeated the Afghans in 1819 near Shupyan. Thus he laid the foundation of Sikh rule in Kashmir. But Sikhs ruled Kashmir for only 27 years. Their rule was no better than that of Afghans, plunder still was the buzz word of the powers that were. After the death of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh in 1839, the Sikhs wasted their power in internal feuds; they lacked a leader who could unify them.

The British India was waiting for such an opportunity and with the help of some smaller rajas, chief amongst them Raja Ghulab Singh of Jammu, struck a decisive blow to the Sikh power.

The conditions of Kashmir after a hundred years of Afghan tyranny and Sikh misrule can be imagined well, but the accounts of travellers of that time portray a grimmer picture of those times, when lashing of starving artisans and flogging of unpaid labour working under the system of *begar* (work got done compulsorily by the unpaid labour) was an open practice. One German traveller, Baron von Schonberg, of that time has written:

"I have been to many lands but nowhere the conditions of human beings present a more saddening spectacle than in Kashmir." According to him the scenes in Kashmir reminded a person of the history of Israelites under Pharaohs, when the Israeli slaves were flogged by their pitiless taskmasters.

The Sikhs were vanquished in 1845 by the British and Maharaja Ghulab Singh got "the territory of Kashmir and territories to the north" for a sum of Rs 75,00,000/- as his reward.

Thus Dogra dynasty came to power in Kashmir in 1846. The new state came to be known as Jammu and Kashmir State. Gen Zorawar Singh of Dogra army launched several difficult campaigns over the Karakoram and fighting at the most difficult passes won Ladakh, Askardu, Zaskar, Gilgit and Chitral for the newly formed Jammu and Kashmir State.

Sensing the great strategic value of Gilgit and Chitral vis-à-vis the growing power of Russia in central Asia, as also the importance of overland trade with the eastern neighbour

China,the British took direct administration of both into their hands. Both cities were invaded and occupied by Pakistan in 1947, when the British left India in a hurry.

Maharaja Ghulab Singh was succeeded by his son Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1857-1885).

Some progress was made towards spreading of road network; a rudimentary cart road was built connecting Jammu city in the south through the mountainous range of Banihal with Srinagar though only for the private use of the ruling dynasty. But Kashmir continued to reel under the after effects of a hundred years of inhuman Afghan torture and Sikh misrule. However reforms started taking shape gradually though. First time in its history Kashmir got a written penal code.

Maharaja Ranbir Singh was succeeded by Maharaja Pratap Singh in 1885 and his rule continued till 1925.

Maharaja Pratap Singh was the third ruler of the Dogra dynasty and under his rule the first steps towards modernization of Kashmir were initiated. These included connecting Srinagar to Jammu by a motorable road over Banihal, though still for the private use of the ruling dynasty, road connecting with Rawalpindi, opening of Gulmarg and Pehalgam tourist resorts and construction of a hydro electric project at Mohra. And, the author ,D.N.Parimoo was born during his benign rule.

Kashmir in Retrospect

It seems I had done some good deeds in my *purva janama*, the previous birth, for having been born in this life in Kashmir, the happy valley. This I consider the luckiest thing that ever happened to me without any of my efforts. Nowhere in this world can a place be found of such a paradise like beauty, grace, grandeur and nobility. Rugged bare mountains, their peaks covered with glistening snow and at places dense forests on their shoulders, form roughly an oval of a vast plain in their lap. This plain, like a diamond in Nature's setting is the vale of Kashmir what once was the happy Valley which has earned epithets like:

bar ruye zamin janat asto, Iyaan asto iyaan ast.

If there is a paradise on earth, it is here, it is here!

Kashmir be nazeer, Kashmir janat pazir.

Kashmir the country without an equal, Kashmir equals
the paradise.

My birth has made me believe in the inscrutable ways of God. July 1911, gynaecology had found no place in the medical system of the times and there was not any need for family planning felt. The result was an ever growing activity of child bearing process.

My survival out of a dozen siblings, who died at various stages of infancy or even at birth, is a miracle. On growing older I would several times be narrated the unusual and miraculous details of my birth, by my several aunts.

The labour pains of my mother having intensified, all knowing *Vareyn*, the midwife, declared that I was in a breech position. I strived successfully to keep my head up, all my life! Perhaps nature wanted that I never bow my head in the world, for which one has to pay a heavy price.

There was no time to shift my mother to the one *zenana* hospital of the city. To save my mother's life, the *vareyn* attending to my mother advised that I be cut into pieces with the needle of a *yender*, the spinning wheel, right inside the womb. This plea of murder in the womb was unanimously approved by the family in order to save my mother's life.

My poor mother, imploring with tears in her eyes prayed for a miracle. And a miracle did happen; some unseen hand from within topsy turveyed me for a life saving exit, and I was born at exact 11 am on 1st of July 1911. I was born safe and sound and my mother also survived this ordeal.

My mother had two daughters left out of the six children born to her. I was the seventh and the last to be born. Children were born at random and in much larger numbers than they are today. In those days birth of male children was considered to be advent of good luck while female children were considered to be a punishment for one's misdeeds of previous births. The misdeed could have been as sinister as *Brahm hatya*, the murder of a Brahmin.

In the absence of gynaecologists and X ray machines, no pregnant woman could think of a proper medical check up .It was an unknown concept in those days. Everything was left to the mercy of nature. Midwifery was a profession practiced by some Muslim ladies called *vareyn* in Kashmiri, albeit without any medical qualifications.

There was one *zenana hospital* in *Nawa Kadal*, the only place in the whole Kashmir valley where a caesarean delivery was very rarely handled and with very little success. The only possible means of transport was a river *shikara*, which involved a pregnant lady to ascend and descend twenty steps at each *ghat*, almost an impossible task for a lady at an advanced stage of pregnancy. No Kashmiri Hindu lady took up the profession of a midwife as it was considered mean and unholy. The unholiness associated with childbirth can be understood by the fact that even the woman who had delivered was considered non pious, segregated from the rest of the family into a small room with windows shut, laid down on floor over a bed sheet. The segregation remained for around ten days and was termed *honchh*. During the period of *honchh*, no outsider would eat or drink in the home of the delivered woman's family.

On the eleventh day, the woman was given a hot water bath and a change of new clothes, likewise with the new born, who was also given a name. Some pieces of *burza*, the dry papyrus bark, were burnt and rotated around the woman and her new born baby for purification and chasing away "of the evil eye".

Vitamins and Protein supplements were unheard of, but the nourishing food post delivery consisted of mutton, fish, ghee or *pakmond rass*, soup made of a lamb's legs, which was very rich in Calcium of high assimilability.

Female education was considered a taboo; the most liberal parents would teach their daughter a little Hindi or Urdu and impart some rudimentary knowledge of religious matters and mythological stories. A girl of 14 years could be married to a man of even 30 years or more. My mother was the third wife at the age of 15 to my father who was 31. He had lost his two previous wives. For men to be married more than once was more a rule than an exception in those times because female mortality was very high.

I too have been married twice, having lost my first wife to tuberculosis within six years of my marriage. A close friend of mine is a widower at the age of 79, even after having been married to four wives. Widow remarriage was against the norms of the Brahmin society. It was a sacrilegious act considered by the extremely orthodox Pandit *Biradari* an act of social defiance.

The first Kashmiri Pandit to have married a widow was ill treated as an outcast and nick named *Sudha-Munda*, the latter meaning a widow and his life was made miserable by an irrational Brahmin society.

Srinagar city of those times was by and large a very dirty one. The tourists visiting Kashmir rarely entered the interiors of the city. In fact going beyond the second bridge Haba Kadal, down to Chhattabal, the last *moholla* of the city, was a taboo for a tourist.

About 70 per cent of the population, mostly poor, illiterate, downtrodden Muslims would defecate in the open on streets. Hindus were a bit better. Soap though known and available made a major appearance as means of cleaning for the masses only as late as 1940s. Instead, a special yellow clay *gurit mech*,

sold by boatmen in the streets of Hindu localities was used as a germicidal detergent of doubtful value. Muslims however didn't use water as a cleaning agent. Their job was done by a piece of hard soil *Isbara Tuji* (Isbara in Arabic meaning Cleansing and Tuj in Kashmiri meaning a round solid piece). For my ancestral home, comprising of nearly seventy people, there was only one brick built latrine, that too without a door. A little water in a rusted metal kettle, carried inside would serve the purpose.

Such poor hygienic practices resulted in frequent epidemics sweeping the valley with vengeance. I remember Pampur town of the famous Kashmiri Saffron hit by Plague twice in my life time. The city of Srinagar was devastated by Cholera half a dozen times. The residents had nothing with which they could combat such situations, all they did was keep green onions in their rooms, burn camphor and dilute a drop or two of some acid in a tumbler of drinking water. All were desperate measures of highly doubtful efficacy.

My step-brother, Shivji, at 18 was one of the countless victims, who lost his life to one of these epidemic breakouts. I was eight but surprisingly confident that I would outlast all and, I did with God's blessings.

In 1932, when I was twelve years of age, I recall having been vaccinated against Cholera and small pox in my Baba Pura School. The introduction of small pox vaccine created quite a stir in the city and many rumours started circulating around its use. A strong rumour was spread that this was a trick by the government to find out those children who would yield some milk drops after vaccination and they would be snatched from their parents and done away with. Some believed that children

yielding milk drops would replace the rulers in due course of time.

People accepted that they would be visited by the dreaded disease of small pox one day eventually. It was given the prestige of divine grace, called Sitala Mata by the Hindus. Many temples were built in her honour. A victim of small pox was religiously quarantined in a separate corner or even a room if one could spare it. Now, Small Pox getting extinct, it seems Sitala Mata has ascended to the heavens to find her abode there!

Though health care was a matter of concern, medical facilities and qualified doctors were minimal. Christian Mission Hospital, Drugjan located at the base of Shankaracharya hill, was established in 1912 by some Catholic missionaries and was considered the best in those times.

But this hospital was hardly approachable by the masses as it was located too far from the main city. There being few qualified allopathic physicians, Dr Neve was the only qualified physician cum surgeon who made it a point to preach the Bible for an hour or two before attending to patients.

Some compounders (unqualified dispensers) and other paramedic staff members of the hospital having learnt about a few medicines from Dr Neve tried their hands treating the patients. A few of them did earn goodwill and a reputation as successful 'doctors'. These quacks distributed four or five medicinal powders to almost all the patients. The powders consisted of Soda Bicarb, Bismuth carb, iodine and mixtures of Nox Vomica. Big bottles containing red coloured cough mixtures for consumption in winter and white coloured amalgam for diarrhoea and dysentery for use in summers were routinely

dispensed. They made a good fortune by selling this little collection of a few medicines round the year to one and all.

Diagnosis was centred on feeling of the pulse aided by the use of a thermometer. Blood pressure measurement was not practiced nor was the stethoscope used even though its existence was known. The first antibiotic, Penicillin, appeared freely in Srinagar in late 1948.

By and large Unani hakims were the most preferred of physicians who were available in every nook and corner of Kashmir valley. Sometimes they did wonders. They were assisted by the hereditary barbers for undertaking simple surgeries for treatment of boils etc. and application of leeches when the hakim thought it advisable to have some dirty blood sucked away from the patient's system. Many of the herbs prescribed by the Unani hakim's still find favour in the shape of concentrates used in medicines.

As a young man, I was relieved of some troublesome kidney stone by a famous Unani hakim of Kashmir, who sent me a telegraphic message while I was staying with a friend who was a fourth year student of Mayo Medical College, Lahore. My friend had advised me to undergo surgery for the kidney stone. But I paid heed to the hakims' telegram and was treated successfully by him. The stone was removed without any surgery.

Till such time that qualified doctors were easily available in Kashmir, we put ourselves in the hands of hakims, vairs, barbers, self taught doctors, fakirs and left the rest to fate.

Surprising as it may sound, most people, felt lucky to be born as Kashmiris. The travails of primeval health services and living conditions were more than compensated for by the rewards of

a serene, beautiful land, richly endowed by nature's generous and loving landscaping, the incomparable waterways, the springs stolen from paradise and the ageless magical gardens.

Waterways and Highways

The gentle shaking woke me up from my post lunch nap, my bride of a few months Lilla was smiling one of her rare smiles. It was a sunny bright Sunday of yet another Spring in the valley.

"Tatia Bab has gone to Dodarhoam village and won't be back till late evening. Could we not go to Parbat and be back before he comes? I heard the almond blossom is in full bloom there". This was the first ever request she had made to me ever since our marriage. Tatia Bab was my elder step brother who officiated as head of the family after my father's death, and was a man to be avoided for such frivolous activities as going on a picnic to watch the almond blossom. Throwing caution to the winds and ignoring the rigid family protocol, summoning all my courage, I declared my intention of going to watch the almond blossom along with my wife, to my mother. Seems the spirit of Spring had suddenly entered my system too; taking leave of my mother, we packed a samovar and some freshly baked *Telvaroods* from the corner baker's shop and managed to find two seats on a *Tonga*, horse driven four seated carriage, to Hari Parbat the hill with a fort on top, lush almond and cherry orchards at the base and along lower slopes.

A few cups of *Sheer chai* with the tasty bites of *Telvarooos* were the perfect accompaniment to the visual feast offered by the lightly and delicately hued profusion of almond flowers; the dreamy purple haze and the pinkish white almond flowers were in abundance and on that Sunday at their perfection. We witnessed a rare Spring sight- large patches of lawn littered with innumerable white little daisies in the bright sunshine. Truly, Spring is beautiful everywhere but the Spring in Kashmir is more beautiful than anywhere particularly on a bright Sunday, unspoilt by an overcast sky.

Life felt so rich, so happy and so fulfilling.

To live in Kashmir, with all its beautiful places was indeed a blessing. I recollect my journeys to some of the picturesque places I visited. I also marvel at the change that has taken place in the system of commuting.

Today when the streets of Srinagar are clogged with trucks, buses, auto rickshaws and motor cycles ,it is well nigh impossible for our younger generation to imagine what transportation meant only about 40-50 years back in Kashmir, leave aside comprehending the romance of travel, particularly along the waterways of the valley.

Waterways

The most important means of transport in Kashmir valley in those times was the boat; the access to half of the city across the river was provided by small 4-6 seated *shikaras*; they were also used for one day picnic to visit the Mughal gardens across the Dal lake. Long journeys for excursions involving overnight stays were done by big boats called *doongas*. Kashmiris loved walking and long distances of 10 to 16 km

were normally traversed by school, college and office going commuters on foot. These pedestrians included people from such outlying areas as Naushehra, Rainawari, Rawalpura, and Hyderpura. All these suburbs were 10 to 15 km away from Srinagar city (centre) proper. About 5% of the commuters had their imported bicycles more often than not, "Made in England" and just about 2% could afford a *tonga* of their own. A *tonga* is horse drawn, has two wheels, four seats back to back and can carry luggage piled up on the splash boards. After a decade or so, around 1940 quite a few *tongas* started running in the interior of the city between Gav Kadal, the hub of Srinagar city, and the suburbs like Sonwar, Drugjan, and Fateh Kadal and to Maharajgunj. The rates charged by *tongas* were too high for most of the commuters, who preferred commuting by boat, a cheaper and more picturesque a ride. My eldest step brother was one of the lucky ones to afford a cycle of his own and I can never forget the pleasant thrill I felt when he carried me on his cycle to his sister's place. This was around 1917/18 when the 1st World war ended.

People, particularly women and children, would ferry by boat a distance of six km from Sheelteng (located near one of the more densely populated areas of Srinagar) to Rainawari, the northern end of the city, through a marshy canal known as *Maerbal*. This Maerbal, the quiet canal of still waters, green in colour due to the rich luxuriant growth of moss had its banks crowded with weeping willow trees, the slender branches of which bent low to drink the nourishing waters of the canal.

Hanjis, the mysterious boat people, ruled the roost. Hardly was there any activity of Kashmiri society wherein Hanjids didn't play some part, be it freight ,trade, travel , stay for a traveller

as in a hotel, marriage procession, welcome processions for VIPs or just frolicking of holidaying crowds.

I was fascinated by the way the Hanji women sometimes indulged in great verbal battles; the choice of abuses and vocabulary was mind boggling even to me, a man born and brought up in Kashmir .Except enriching the Kashmiri language, these battles did no harm to anyone, provided one turned or at least pretended to turn a deaf ear to their high pitched torrent of invectives and dialogue deliveries. Sometimes even the toughest of these slim bodied sharp eyed women of the boats would feel exhausted and their vocal cords dried up; an unwritten code just meant for such occasions was to bring their *fota* (a big wicker basket) and position it upside down in view of the opposing party. The ceasefire was immediate and meticulously observed for any breach of the code would be considered very immoral by the Hanjis brotherhood. The other party responded promptly and put up their *fota* in similar position, signalling that the battle for the day was over and would be commenced next day morning, *Insha Allah*, God willing!

"*Mala bai dhakh kar*", O mistress of boat, mind the course of the boat, was the common refrain and a sure way of teasing as also flirting with the boatwoman whose job was to keep the big massive *doonga* steering on course. Very often she would reward us, the young lads, with a meaningful smile, provided the Hanji, busy poling, at the other end didn't get suspicious. The Hanji women of *doongas* were rumoured to be promiscuous with a liberal attitude towards life in otherwise a very conservative society. A *doonga* as mentioned earlier is a big flat hulled boat .It can be fifty to sixty feet in length and nearly six feet in width .Matting forms the roof and the side

walls are supported by a frame work of *Deodar* the pine wood. The matting " windows" are to be rolled up or down as required. If strong chilly winds are blowing "*Malla*" the boat- captain, will order all these windows to be rolled up so the boat offers least resistance to the winds when the weather turns rough. The major part of the boat is used by the traveller .The hind part which is much smaller, is occupied by the boatman, his wife and children. They live there round the year (but now I understand most of the doongas sadly are becoming a story of the past). The helm is traditionally held by the lady of the boat family, the husband remains busy with the pole ,*hamtul*, for propelling the boat and the children if old enough, help with the heart shaped paddles. A pantry placed under the removable false flooring completes the arrangements for a reasonably comfortable stay for a few days.

By and large boat ferrying in the city, right from Sonwar, 3 kms upstream of Amirakadal, the first bridge over the river Jhelum, down to Chhattabal the last urban post, was a common and pleasant way to travel the entire length of the city. The carrier was the beautiful *Shikara*, the flat hulled small boat, with a single boatman. Kashmiris are artistic by nature and this can be seen in the way they decorate their *shikaras*, which though aesthetically appealing, are not particularly designed for safety, and even moderately choppy waters can be scary.

Although the Hanjis of Kashmir claim to be Noah's descendents, the construction of their boats, particularly the *Shikaras* makes their claim very suspicious. *Shikaras* serve the purpose of crossing the river if need be, or when well covered with a roof, for picnics around the city including to Dal lake and the Mughal gardens. Plying the *Shikara* over the Dal is a unique experience, you hear the gentle languid chop of the paddle or

sometimes you hear the gentle waves splashing against your boat.

A *Shikara* picnic over Jhelum was an altogether different experience. These picnics were undertaken in the afternoons when the *ghats* would be crowded with women washing, scrubbing and shouting at their young kids and at each other for no obvious reason. The little urchins would be running amuck, all naked, diving into the river like the geese and ducks that swam around in flocks. The urchins, ducks and the geese would raise a cacophony each of their own which somehow didn't get on one's nerves in that playful; pleasant atmosphere, rather it sounded more like the music of the gently flowing river.

While the picnics to places around Dal lake were done in *Shikaras*, the longer overnight stays and larger parties were conducted in *Doongas*- a boat much bigger than the *shikara* covered with a wooden or thatched roof. Though an occasional houseboat also would move around to visit the picnic spots but being much slower and unfit for going up shallow tributaries, they were the least preferred for picnics to nearby Mughal gardens. Both, *doongas* or the stately houseboats had the same means of progression that is paddles, poling and hauling with the help of long strong ropes.

Tongas operated from Maisuma, Gav Kadal, the well known quarter of Srinagar, to almost any destination in the city.

The smells and sounds of Maisuma bazaar and the old *Tonga* stand, Gav Kadal included, are hard to forget. It is difficult to say where Maisuma ends and Gav Kadal begins; a rickety old bridge named Gav Kadal stands at the head of Maisuma. There used to be a large cement tank serving as the watering hole for the innumerable horses and the stray cattle assembled there

with their *tonga* carriages. Their masters, the *Tongawallahs*, the descendants of the notorious but tragic Galwaan tribe, reduced from the position of courtiers and soldiers to that of horse caretakers and driven by poverty even to highway robbery, assembled in groups passing a hookah around and nonchalantly waiting for a customer. Dried hay remained strewn over most of the road mixed with horse and cow dung which was in constant and abundant supply. Many poor Kashmiri women and their young daughters would be busy collecting the dung to be dried and later used as fuel.

A little further away, tucked in a corner, was a kebab shop generally doing brisk business at lunch time and in late evenings when the "government licensed Liquor shop" was busy in the evening serving its shady clientele. The society had never approved or accepted alcohol consumption but the followers of Bacchus knew all about the location of watering holes. The most mouth-watering kebabs though were from Ahdu's – the favourite meeting spot of journalists, intellectuals and food lovers of Srinagar.

This old restaurant of Srinagar still attracts a large clientele old as well as new.

As a young man I used to frequently walk along the raised bank of Jhelum, called the bund, on the border of Maisuma area, opposite the Old Secretariate of Srinagar city.

The fringes of this part of the bund were dotted with small rickety houses of *Tonga* owners on the land on one side and by Doongas with the families that lived in these boats, anchored to the bund on the river Jhelum on the other side. On an occasional day I would see groups of women from the two sides shouting fierce abuses at each other and giving vent to their

suppressed anguish by their slanging match, on this stretch of bund bordering the Maisuma Street. While they hurled choicest invectives, abuses and swore at each other with "appropriate gesticulations", leaving little to the imagination of a curious spectator like me! The menfolk would meekly try to calm them down. These verbal wars could happen over issues like a missing chicken or worse still over the evil eye, *Nazare bad*.

This generally meant an unnamed but known woman had caused the death or worse still disappearance of a chicken, or sickness of some other woman's son or husband just by wishing it.

No matter how fierce they looked when shouting, never do I remember witnessing any scene of physical violence. Forgetting my college I would spend hours to witness these high spirited shouting and slanging matches which at any time were more interesting and absorbing than listening to the Professor's long lectures on Shakespeare or Sigmund Freud. Many of these women looked very beautiful, in fact too beautiful to indulge in such intense, spirited and vocal outbursts of hate and anger, passion and fantasy.

Well this was Maisuma; politically an important and sensitive part of Srinagar city that played crucial roles during the Quit Kashmir movement in 1945. This area of the city does play now also an important role for the Hurriyat separatist movement.

Mysterious and mixed charms of Maisuma were many; a Hindu temple of prominence located there called the Bhairav Mandir is inconspicuous despite the considerable area it occupies; one has to look for it. The garden inside the temple premises which were well gated, looked lush green, but when I walked inside the temple I detected a strange smell around the outhouses of

the temple. The smell was coming in whiffs to me sometimes accompanied by uncontrolled coughing bouts of people inside the surrounding little outhouses; these were the *sadhus*, the real serene ones and also the pretentious ascetics, drawn from all corners of India. They were camping here for their eventual trek to Pahalgam or to Sonamarg, the golden meadow, and onwards to Amar Nath cave, the cave with an ice phallus the representative image of the Hindu God Shiva. Those days when no medical teams or tent carriers accompanied the pilgrims and road consisted of a narrow dirt path over the mountains prone to strong blizzards and heavy rains and snow, several of them would never come back and they all knew it. Very few Kashmiri Pandits undertook this pilgrimage *yatra*; and so far I have never met a *sadhu* of Kashmiri origin smeared with ashes, hair all a matted mess and almost nude!

"Allakh" "Allakh Niranjan" were the shouts rendered like war cries by the ash smeared *sadhus* dragging on *chillums*, the smoking terra cotta pipes, filled with dried hemp (bhang) or *charas* (hashish).

This temple complex sometimes housed the Nanga Sadhus, too, the ascetics in birth day suits; till the pilgrimage to Amarnath cave started. Traditionally the procession of Amarnath pilgrimage called *Chhadi* used to start from this temple only; however the number of pilgrims participating was a fraction of what it is today.

This Bhairav temple at Gav Kadal was generally used by *tantriks*. Animal sacrifice mainly of sheep was carried out to appease *Kali* and many secret rituals were carried out here to worship *Bhairavs* using Tantrik practices.

As a young boy I was forbidden even to peer inside the big steel gates of this temple. I did not have the courage to ask my elders the reason, but my fertile imagination continued to play havoc within my mind, after I had seen a sheep slaughtered right inside the temple premises.

Long journeys via river Jhelum lasting several days were both affordable and extremely enjoyable. These journeys were undertaken more for holidaying, like ship cruises of modern times, than for the exigencies of travel.

These long journeys involving a few nights' stay in a *doonga*, can be more thrilling an experience than camping can be. One has the unlimited choice of the many miles long river bank, to stay for a night or more. During the day several roofless *shikaras* approach the doonga offering their goods for sale. These could include anything from a napkin to water chest nuts, lotus stems or fresh live trout. We used to spend time in the style of real lotus eaters. Time ceased to be a criterion. We would eat freshly fried *pakodas* and potato fingers, drink cups of *kahwa*, play chess or cards and of course have our lunch or dinner with sharpened appetites especially when the aroma of fried fish wafted out from the "kitchen".

The kitchen consisted of a wood burning earthen oven under the false, removable floor of the doonga and allowed just one cooking pot to be used at a time. This made waiting painfully long especially as the hunger pangs would get sharper in anticipation of food. As we approached the downstream town of Baramulla the size of the fish got bigger and so did our appetites. Mahseer, a fish which grows up to even 15 to 20 kg abounds in these waters, is highly valued by the gaming enthusiasts as also by the gourmets. Very special bargaining

skills were called for, while buying anything particularly the fish from the river fish vendors. In our case the job was undertaken by my late father in law, Pt Dinanath Dhar. The actual purchase was a long drawn affair, demanding drama and diplomacy, threats and endearment, by both the buyer as well as the seller.

Occasional small villages along the banks of the river Jhelum offer a unique spectacle; these little houses of mud thatched roofs had the yellow mustard growing on their roofs.

The mustard growing on roof tops of quaint little mud houses and the yellow flowers swaying with the gentle breeze presented a fabulous sight. On sighting our passing *doonga* the village kids rushed to the bank shouting "*hey hasa*" greetings to us. The village belles pretending to be concerned only with their chores of cleaning the utensils or washing their linen on the river bank would cast long languid furtive glances at us. The older women would look boldly and even shout their friendly enquiry as to how far we would be going "*Kot ju chhiv gachhan*" where are you headed to? The men just didn't notice us!

Another memorable *doonga* trip, cruising over Jhelum upstream, was from Srinagar to Anantnag, which I enjoyed once as a participant of a marriage party and once with my step sister to visit the holy Hindu town of Mattan, 8 miles by road from Anantnag.

At Mattan, my brother in law performed *SHRAD* a ceremony in memory of his ancestors.

Mattan was an important pilgrimage centre of Pandits who kept the big tribe of Brahmins there profitably busy, performing *hawans*, and the ritual of fire and ancestor worship. Some of

these Brahmins called *Pandas* jumped on a prospective visiting devotee like a mass of flies; they were a great nuisance though they did a splendid job by keeping records of families that visited Mattan, over ages, the records passed from father to son. These *Pandas* boasted of having family trees of all Kashmiri Pandits, a claim I regret to say, I cannot vouch for. Wonder what happened to these archives built over generations of *Pandas* after the latest exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley.

Nostalgic memories of my childhood still haunt me of sitting on the stone steps of the Porshyar ghat along with my sister Zapri, our feet in the flowing river and watching the Jhelum flow down on its way to the breach in the mountains surrounding the valley, a romantic, nerve soothing an experience of Nirvana. In the evening around 6 pm the *Nirmaal*, discharged into the river after the *puja* at Maharaja's Gadadhar temple, Jhelum wore a veil of lotus flowers and roses, which gave river Jhelum even though for a short while a look that the rivers of Paradise would feel jealous of. These flower offerings were a regular feature during H H Maharaja Pratap Singh's reign.

European tourists, mostly the British, enjoyed a boat trip from Sonawar down to Chhattabal. This enabled them to view the city without encountering the foul smells and filthy roads of the densely populated parts of the city. However they preferred employing at least four boatmen for their speedy trips. This practice always confounded me. To enjoy the gently flowing Jhelum this haste looked so unseemly. The speed at which they rushed past was however a splendid sight for us children and to watch the fleeting boats, carrying the white skinned foreigners, surrounded by flowers scattered over the water had a dream like effect. Much later in my life I realised that this high speed

boat cruise was a demonstration of the British might to impress the boatmen, the layman, as also the children!

Excursion to Wular lake

The memory of an excursion to Wular in 1940s will haunt me as long as I am conscious of the world around me; I know a repeat of the same cannot be achieved in my lifetime or ever after if there be an afterlife at all, for the Wular is dying and has reportedly shrunk by one third. This great lake alas is drying up and decaying thanks to the indifference and callousness of man.

Our extended family of around 12 persons including children once went to Wular Lake by a *doonga* to attend the famous Kumbh Mela there. Leaving our home at an early hour we proceeded to the ghat where from we had booked our *doonga* for this excursion cum *yatra*. Putting all the pots and pans at their designated places and after a final head count of the extended family, the *Hanjis* (the boatmen and their families) proceeded down the Jhelum flowing through the Srinagar city. The late morning, bright sunshine and the bebies of Kashmiri beauties on the river *ghats*, beating their clothes to pulp or rubbing clean their copper utensils as clean as they could, the swarms of noisy ducks and swans, the *tongas* running at their monotonous speed on the overhead bridges, these memories remain embedded in my mind.

After passing the whole length of the city, we were in a comparatively open country. Fields of rich yellow mustard crop and other crops slid down to the river banks on either side from the rugged sides of the surrounding far away mountains. The loftiest and the farthest peaks were crowned with glistening snow and their shoulders were loaded with jungles of trees and

vegetation. What a delightful contrast it was to the scenes of the city and how calming to the mind?

Floating down the peaceful, tranquil river that Jhelum is, we passed the pretty grove of Sunnybawan with its famous *chinars* (*Buniy* trees of Kashmiris) growing down to the river's bank as if to drink from its waters. After about five hours of this memorable Jhelum trip we approached closer to the mountain ranges which had earlier seemed so distant. This wild and extensive mountain range is the entrance approach to Sind Valley. A little ahead we reach Shadipur and the Prayag, the holy junction of Sind, Jhelum and the invisible, mythical Saraswati. The junction is holy to Hindus since time immemorial. Many cases of self immolation have been committed here, in olden times, by devout Hindus hoping to be conferred a holy bliss by the sacred waters.

Immediately below Shadipur we took the Nnoroo canal leading to Wular lake. Soon we reached Sumbal village where some of our very dear relatives were waiting for us with cooked rice and *Nadir yakhni*, *dam aalu* and *haak*, all Kashmiri vegetarian fare, as mutton or fish were taboo during a holy yatra. But their best gift was the party of four musicians to keep us company till we returned safe and sound. They were the *chhakri* singers headed by a quaint little man named Maam Gadva, he never told us his real name, but I guess it might have been Ghulam Mohammed Gadva.

Proceeding down the river we saw the village Hajan on the left bank of the river. This place is considered as the probable site of Parihas Pur, a city reported to have been founded by the brightest and worthiest of Kashmiri Hindu Kings, Lalitaditya, of which now a few ruins remain.

Further drifting down Jhelum we entered the Wular lake, the banks of which were already crowded with devout Hindus. It was truly a magnificent body of water said to be about 12 miles long and around eight miles broad. It is surrounded by marshy areas. The surface is covered with lotus, *singhara* and other water plants; the popular Kashmiri delicacy *nadru* or lotus root grows here in the water. The shores gently slope down to the river from the lofty range of mountains which surround it in the northeast. Like all lakes surrounded by mountains, Wular too is frequently susceptible to sudden gales converting the usually calm waters into an angry raging sea. This is why the people are scared of crossing Wular, one can never be sure when *Wular Raza's* mood will change to that of a raging bull.

Maam Gadva the musician was having his tea break when with least prompting he started narrating to us the folklore about the vagaries of Wular, his tragic, superstitious stories narrated in his hushed tones; our presence on this very lake and the murmur of little waves, gave us all goose pimples. His account of occasions when a passenger on the boat had to be thrown into the lake as a sacrifice to appease the Wular Raza was more than what most of us could bear to hear. Everyone even the usually very vocal ladies were silent. Summoning courage my father in law got up and after lighting another petromax requested Maam Gadva to sing some nice devotional songs to put an end to his frightening stories.

There is one island, named Lanka in the lake. It is raised and shaped by the famous Kashmiri Sultan, Badshah Zain-ul-Aabidin, who is said to have constructed it out of the ruins of an already existing city that was swallowed by rising waters of the lake.

Springs of Paradise-

Anantnag, Achhabal, Verinag, Kokernag.

Anantnag

The beauty and historical richness of Anantnag district of southern Kashmir, inspired me so much in my youth that I continued to visit this area as often as I could and hereby I would like to narrate what I saw, experienced and read about the more exquisite places of this part of Kashmir now shunned by explorers and casual visitors alike as it has become the troubled area of Kashmir.

My official appointment in 1936 at Uma and then at Utarsu, two of the many small villages of this district, gave me a leisurely time to study this enchanting area of southern Kashmir. Uma is just one mile away from Achhabal. I would frequently visit Achhabal accompanied by my wife and my son who was only a few months old. At Achhabal, one of the largest of the Kashmir springs is situated at the foot of a low range of hills. Water here rises from beneath the limestone rock and gushes out at several places.

The principal spring makes its way up a fissure with enough force to send a sizeable stream of water to a considerable height.

There is also a theory that the water appearing here is the reappearance of river BRINGH, which a few miles away, after flowing for some distance disappears through the large fissure of a rocky bed.

Many years ago this spot was a favourite of ancient Sultans and also later of the Mughals. Bernier, the first ever European

to visit Kashmir in 1663, during Emperor Aurangzeb's reign talks of his visit to Achhabal:

"It is a place of pleasure belonging to old kings of Kashmir and at present to the great Mogul. Its principal beauty is a great fountain of which the water disperses itself on all sides around a building which is not devoid of elegance and flows through the gardens by a hundred canals.

It comes out of the Earth as if it remounted and returned from the bottom of a well with violence and boiling, and in such abundance that it may rather be called a river than a fountain." "The garden is very beautiful on account of its alleys, reservoirs are full of fish and a kind of cascade very high which on falling makes a great sheet of thirty or forty paces in length, the effect of which is admirable, particularly at night, when they have placed below it an infinity of little lamps which are arranged in holes made on purpose in the well, all of which is of very great beauty."

Much water has flown down river Jhelum since these lines were written by Bernier, and much deterioration has taken place to the buildings that the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan had built at Achhabal. They are standing in ruins, overshadowed by the great Chinar trees that were possibly planted at the same time and have continued to grow in their splendid isolation and in their size and beauty. Man's work is subject to decay, but Nature's remains unaltered over millions of years though with exceptions. The magnificent stream of the spring joins with other flowing streams and quietly joins the Jhelum near Anantnag, the district headquarters.

Verinag

A *tonga* ride of about 22 km from Achhabal brings one to the source of the Jhelum river, the most celebrated of

Kashmir springs ,Verinag. Here very cold water gushes out in considerable volume, being first received in an octagonal stone basin which is approximately 40 yards wide and is of considerable depth. Here one sees an unusual sight of crowded fish, the *naag gard* of Pandits, and a taboo to kill.

On leaving the basin, the water flows through a series of canals on terraces, shortly joining the Sandhrahan river which flows steadily onwards to join the mighty Jhelum river near Anantnag. It is at the joining of these three rivers of Arpat, Bringh and Sandhrahan that Jhelum commences its quiet, highly navigable journey to Srinagar. Mention needs to be made here of the ruins of an old garden and palace built by another Mughal Emperor Jahangir around 1619. The basin of Verinag is said to have been designed and built by him. Legend has it that Jahangir desired to die by the side of this beautiful spring though it could not be, as he died before he could reach Kashmir and his body was laid to rest in Lahore.

Kokernag

The distance from Verinag to Kokernag about 10 km; this is on the ancient route to Kishtwar. Here a beautiful spring gushes out most profusely at five different places from the foot of a reportedly limestone rock. The water of this spring is supposed to cure lots of skin diseases and definitely is very helpful to digestion. Dogras introduced trout farming here which was doing fairly well till very recent times.

I don't know what the gluttony of man has done to them now.

Seven kilometres to the south east of Kokernag is a bridge of very great historic value. This is Tansan bridge over the river Bringh. This bridge, near which stands the tumbled

down masjid of Haji Daud Sahib on the hillside has been a place of strategic importance, a scene of several clashes between Kashmiris and Kishtwaris. Numerous have been the fights between these two mountainous countries of ages bygone at this location. The deciding and final fight which is most remembered was between Maharaja Gulab Singh and Teg Singh who was the independent Raja of Kishtwar. The independent Raja Teg Singh of Kishtwar gave himself up without a fight.

On the road of Verinag to Achhabal was the legendary town of Shangus. This town was famous for its *nautch* girls and the debauchery of the rich, but what remains today is an unrecognizable tumbled down nondescript village.

In the paradise of South Kashmir lies the river Veshau, a river next only to Jhelum in its majesty. This river rises from Konsarnag, a far-famed lake situated at the very top of the mountain range of Pir Panjal at an elevation between twelve and thirteen thousand feet. Leaving the lake through an irregular rocky opening on the west the river falls into a deep channel, which has been carved out of black rocks worn over millions of years, forming several picturesque waterfalls along its way. Finally after completing its wild dance and exhausting its fury it joins Jhelum five miles below the town of Bijbehara.

Picnics around Srinagar

Emperors Shah Jahan, Jahangir and Prince Dara Shikoh have in one voice expressed the joys of the famous Mughal gardens in the Farsi couplet:

*"Subah darbagh e Nishat, Shyam dar baghe Nasim
Shalamaro Lala zaro, dilpasand Kashmir ast "*

Morning in Nishat garden and evening in Nasim garden

Shalimar and pastures filled with lala flowers, make Kashmir dear to heart.

Very few places in the Indian subcontinent can rival Kashmir for the places open to public of such heavenly beauty as the Mughal gardens of Kashmir. As a young man I could visit all of these places sometimes with friends but more often alone, pedalling effortlessly on a bicycle. Much later in life I would take along my family too but in a *shikara* on Sundays or on festive holidays. Though so close to the city, these places are created by God for tranquillity, seclusion and repose. The unique locations of the Mughal gardens point to very high calibre minds who have selected these classic locations with an artistic and a spiritualistic mind.

I am referring to the widely known gardens of Chashma Shahi, Nishat, Shalimar, Nasim Bagh and Parimahal. The State Government with the active support of Government of India is trying to have these sites included in the World heritage sites.

The oldest of these all is the NASIM BAGH- *garden of bliss*- built by emperor Akbar in 1586-89. This landscaped garden is located at the western end of Dal lake. A large area of this garden was allotted for the construction of Kashmir University in recent past. However the lake front remains blissfully unspoiled and even a camping site has not caused much deterioration. Emperor Shah Jahan is credited with the planting of 1200 Chinar trees here in the year 1635 AD of which many still survive.

The gigantic Chinar trees are claimed to have been originally introduced from Iran. This claim is contested by some, who

believe *Buniya*, called chinar by Iranians has been a native of Kashmir much before the Mughals brought additional saplings from Iran. These majestic trees survive for long periods some say centuries. However a chinar tree sometimes gets devoured by a fire that is produced at or near its bottom in a hollow for unknown reasons, hence the expression *aatish e chinar*. These mammoth green trees get reflected in the evenings on the placid waters of Dal giving the Dal Lake an emerald colour. It is a delight to watch and many a people sitting in their small boats, the *shikaras*, at some distance from the garden, patiently watch the lengthening shadows till late dusk.

NISHAT BAGH –the pleasure garden

I remember this garden the most, staying here in Ahmedabad in wait for that final day that a man of my age must be ready for. For it was here in this garden that I hosted a picnic for my very dear friend Mahjoor the celebrated Kashmiri poet.

This garden is smaller than the Shalimar Bagh but arguably the more beautiful of the two. Its layout and construction were carried out by one Asif Khan, brother in law of Emperor Jahangir. The peculiar feature of this garden is that it appears to be gradually descending by way of its 12 terraces, from the hills at its back to almost the banks of Dal Lake.

A large number of Chinara trees give this garden a dignity and beauty peculiar to it alone. Some of the Chinara trees are believed to be as old as the Mughal dynasty.

A few, nondescript buildings of Mughal vintage still stand, the mute sentinels, the ruins of a glorious bygone era.

SHALIMAR BAGH-the garden of romance

It was built by Emperor Jahangir in 1616 when it was named as "Farrah Bakhsh". The major highlight of this garden is the artistically designed water canal flowing through its centre and a perfect row of fountains in the centre along its length. An irrigation canal built just below the hills at the back and outside the garden premises supplies the water to the garden canal, with the black stone flooring, from nearby Harwan.

The garden is split into four terraces. On the fourth terrace is erected a magnificent black stone pavilion; the roof of the pavilion is flat, supported on each side by a row of six pillars. This was previously used by the court ladies and also as a banquet hall.

Very recently a Mughal period *hamam*, a hot water bath, was discovered buried under the earth. It has seven rooms, some still having old copper pipes and conforms to structural details of a typical Mughal royal bath.

A striking feature of this garden is that the trees as also the fountains seem to be receding backwards into the mountains. This is a striking architectural contrast to Nishat where a reverse picture is discernible.

CHASHMA SHAHI- *the royal spring*

On our visits to Nishat or Shalimar and after having more than a bellyful of rice and *Rogan josh* or *matsch and rotis*, we would make it a point to come to Chashma Shahi and drink glasses of the spring water, so that by the time of dinner when at home, we would again be hungry to the great chagrin of our wives.

Built at the elevation of a hill, this garden provides a wonderful view of Shankaracharya hill (Takhat e Sulemaan), Parimahahal and the Dal lake. However the place of honour is held by the gushing spring of water, cool clean and of proven digestive properties. Prized for its unique mineral content several attempts were made from time to time to deprive the common man of this elixir and turn it into a bottled commercial product. The devotion of Kashmiri public to this spring successfully thwarted many such attempts.

The garden measuring about 108 metres x 30 metres was laid by Jahangir in 1632.

The garden has been divided into three terraces decorated by an aqueduct and a water fall.

PARIMAHAL- the abode of fairies

This was a small garden built by Dara Shikoh, son of Shah Jahan for the use of his spiritual teacher, the Sufi preacher Mula Shah. It is said to have housed a Buddhist monastery in ancient times. Dara Shikoh spent considerable time here studying astrology and astronomy.

The state government has restricted the entry to this place now, possibly because of its commanding strategic location overlooking Srinagar city.

Road travel

Out of the city and in far off villages people walked distances of about 16 kms one way to the destination and back home. I as a touring officer for 12 years, during the tenure of my service, had no alternative but to climb on foot mountainous places, where it was risky to go on a horseback. "LONG WALKS

MEAN LONG LIFE" was an axiom coined by Gandhiji. Inspired by this axiom that we read in his journal HARIJAN, we a group of friends organized biweekly excursions on foot to Pampur, Nishat, Nagin, Khrew, Ishiber, all beautiful spots surrounding Srinagar city. The pioneer of this "fraternity" was late Pt Aftab Kaul. The late Pt Aftab Kaul was a great zealot and pioneer of Women Welfare Trust and a great votary of female education in Kashmir. A member of Theosophical trust he was very close to Madam Anne Besant, the well known founder of Theosophical Society.

It was the privilege of a few *lambardars*, *zaildars* and tradesmen to maintain horses for their transportation. Of course ponies were used to transport edibles, firewood etc. To maintain a horse was a sign of aristocracy in a village.

Srinagar city was connected to the outside world via Rawalpindi (now Pakistan) by means of *YEKKAS*, the bullock carts, plying on the JV(Jhelum Valley) Road, till 1918, thanks to the pioneering efforts of Maharaja Pratap Singh. *Yekka* was a cart driven by two sturdy bulls. Coming from Kuhala, a journey lasting about a week, they would collect for their board and lodge at a place near outskirts of Srinagar. The place was known as *Yekka sarai*. A customs office was located in one wing of the *sarai*, consisting of a quadrangle surrounded by four long one storey buildings, which lodged *yekka bans*, the owner drivers of the *yekkas*. This site could accommodate about fifty *yekkas* with their bulls, the needed fodder, utensils for cooking etc. The bulls, sturdy creatures of white grey colour and long pointed horns were bedecked with beads of white, red, azure pigmentation, as also brass tinkers that heralded their passage on the roads.

These *yekkas* mostly travelled during night when JV Road was free from pedestrians, horses and stray domestic animals.

A small lantern was kept burning under the driver's seat while travelling. It was quite usual to hear the *yekka* bans singing in high pitches while travelling in the night. The *yekka* owners were not all trustworthy as my revered father found. He was deputed by Maharaja Pratap Singh to Lahore in January 1911 to organise a Kashmir stall there as a part of All India Exhibition in honour of King George V's visit to India. As narrated by my father, he had a narrow escape from a fatal surprise attack on him by his *yekka* ban, a few miles off Kuhala (in an attempt to deprive him of his cash that he was carrying on his person). Being a brave and stout man, my father was lucky to have survived.

The 200 mile journey to the railhead at Rawalpindi could take eight or 15 days depending whether one took a faster pony *yekka* or a slower but cheaper bullock drawn *yekka*.

The more important towns on the route, starting from Srinagar, were Patan, Baramulla, Uri, Garhi, Dumel, Kohala and Mureetret.

This route was open practically round the year, except when heavy snow fell over the Muree hills or between Rampur and Baramulla. This would happen in the months of January and February.

The *yekkas* were totally extinct by 1934, having been replaced by trucks, lorries and finally buses. Even motor cars and jeeps started running on JV Road. However in October 1947 the road got blocked at Uri, 68 miles away from Srinagar city, after the tribal raiders, sent by Pakistan to forcibly occupy Kashmir, were

driven out by army and the Line of Actual Control was defined by UNO.

The Banihal cart road was initially built as a private road for the Dogra rajas and nobles but gradually was thrown open to public at large. The road crossed the Pir Panjal range at a height of 10,000 feet through a tunnel, and was closed for the winter months owing to heavy snow fall over Banihal and heavy rains causing landslides near the river Chenab around Ramban.

The buses and trucks used were the narrow and small Ford and Chevrolet First World War models, most of them in advanced state of disintegration. It was quite usual to hear about bus or truck accidents because of steering or brake failures.

In 1947, soon after its creation, Pakistan cut all the essential supplies to Kashmir, resulting in paralysis of the transport system as there was no fuel for the buses. I remember getting stranded along with my family on the Srinagar Jammu highway over the Banihal(Pir Panjal range of mountains) in October 1947 while on way to Udhampur, about 80 km before Jammu city. For four harrowing days and nights, the passengers –old, young and children- were exposed to severest forms of the elements of a cruel nature with nothing to eat or very little to drink.

The horror of this traffic jam is still fresh in the memories of people who were caught in it, with heavy snowfall all around on a narrow road meandering high up in the mountains, chilly winds whistling past most of the time and no food for the large number of passengers travelling in several buses, all huddled in the nondescript huts of the village of Qazigund.

Many decades later, a young man caught in the same jam told me a soul stirring story of an old woman's hospitality which is narrated in the footnotes .

However the normal journey time involved an overnight halt at Banihal, or Batote or Kud, all the three beautiful wayside small villages perched high up in the hills, except Banihal which is daringly so close to the banks of roaring Chenab River on a mad rush to its ultimate destination.

Generally chaotic conditions prevailed on this highway, which had come under much heavier traffic load than was ever perceived. Civil supplies including even salt had to be rushed to the valley; the troops fighting to drive the lawless marauders from Pakistan, needed the highway and of course the last priority was the common man.

Consequent to this, the Banihal cart road was developed with a new twin tube tunnel, Jawahar Tunnel, built at great cost and effort. It was thrown open to public in 1954 and Dr Rajender Prasad, President of the Indian Republic, came for the opening ceremony of the tunnel. The new tunnel being at a height of just 5,000 feet only, the journey time to Jammu was reduced to one day's travel.

The transport industry in Kashmir got a great fillip, as did many other development schemes after the ascent of late Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, to power in 1948. Big fleets of modern trucks and buses came into the valley in droves and in ever increasing numbers. The late Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad who followed Sheikh *sahib* as the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir state gave a still greater boost to modernisation of transport. In fact his too close an interest in development of transport department and expansion of its state-owned

fleet may have given the grist to rumour mills that his political opponents had started, which gained greater credence as some of his close family members did openly get benefited by this association of his with the transport industry.

Trade flourished with mobility and many new avenues were opened both for job seekers and entrepreneurs, giving an unprecedented boost to Kashmir's economy.

The new towns that came into prominence because of the development of new highway are:

Pampur, Qazigund, Banihal, Batote, and Udhampur (now a railhead).

Pampur is becoming an industrial area, though unfortunately at the cost of its unique saffron cultivation monopoly. The cultivation of saffron today is being neglected as the people have found other avenues of making quick money.

The once sleepy little villages perched high up on the Pir Panjal range are attracting droves of tourists to the remarkable tourist facilities at Patni top and the nearby beautiful meadow of Sanasar, close rival to the legendary meadow of Gulmarg.

Udhampur, where I spent about a year on duty in 1948, is unrecognisable now having become the HQ of Indian army's northern command and also the nearest railhead to Srinagar.

Aviation as a means of public transport came into prominence only after 1948, primarily necessitated by defence considerations. The three air strips at Jammu, Srinagar and Leh, though had been constructed by Maharaja Hari Singh, have been turned into state of art airports now.

The cumulative effect of an extraordinary natural environment was reflected in the way of life of its people. Mother Nature had not only bestowed on Kashmir the beautiful accomplishment of its artistry, but the all pervading, omnipotent influence it had on the psyche of masses, the minds and moods of its children, and the mirth and merriment they expressed from time to time on festivals and marriages, the rich culinary arts and richer appetites, the soulful heart touching music, the mild and tolerant disposition of people, which was considered as timidity by the superficial observers or coarse mortals across the borders.

Footnotes

1. The general atmosphere around **Maerbal** in a piquant way reflects the conditions of Kashmiris over the centuries, no one talked about its poetic solitude, nor was it photographed for its serene beauty and the green rows of the weeping willows, except by a Mumbai filmmaker to show the grenades rocking Kashmir and people dying the bloody deaths- a violent vicious Maerbal that it never was.
2. **Hanjis:** No one is sure about the ethnic roots of the Hanjis, some historians claim they are the same gypsies that Alexander's army took away as slaves now known as Romanis. Though these Hanjis of Kashmir have been converted into Muslims for last several centuries, it is interesting to know that they too have a caste system which is quite functional till date. It was the last, on the bottom of the Hanji caste system, the *Gard Hanz*,

the professional fisherfolk, that always caught my fancy. These Hanjis are the most colourful of their tribe. The *Doonga* Hanz were placed third in the caste system of Hanjis after the *Bahaach Hanz* and the *Demb Hanz*. The *Bahaach Hanz* were engaged in ferrying of cargo of considerably heavy loads of grain, bricks or stone for construction, in their wide-bodied bigger than *doonga* boats while the *Demb Hanz* were engaged with the peculiar agriculture system of the floating fields of lakes. The bottom of the list was reserved for the *Gard hanz*, the fisherfolk.

3. Some historians relate the **Galwaans** to famous Chak dynasty, and also as the backbone of Kashmiri army during the sultanate that was made extinct by Afghans. It sounds logical that these famous horsebacks, either turned soldiers or took to robbery after losing their vocation during Afghan rule.

4. Hospitality of highlanders

A young man of 18 years was leaving Kashmir to seek his fortune elsewhere in the country, but got trapped in the traffic jam at Qazigund due to closure of the road. Anxious to reach Delhi in time for an interview he was pacing up and down the streets, braving the slush, the snow and the savage chilly wind of the shanty little town of Qazigund, where most of the passenger buses had been assembled to wait till the road was cleared. By sheer luck he met a villager who had crossed the Banihal pass only one day earlier

on foot. Making friends with this highlander he secured a promise of help from him in crossing the pass on foot and then catching a transport from the other side of the mountain range. All settled, he and his highlander companion left for a little hamlet at the base of Banihal mountain to spend the night there, so they could hike their way up to the pass very early next day morning. Despite repeated offers by the highlander to stay the night at his home the young Pandit preferred to pass the night in a small temple he spotted there. The kindly villager sensing the sensibilities of a Brahmin spread the word in the small hamlet and soon an old Pandit lady came to the temple where the young man was staying and offered him some rice, vegetables and a tiny little piece of cooked fish. With great embarrassment and hesitation, she told him only a small piece of fish was left as she had fed half of the piece of fish to her paralysed husband who had been prescribed fish by the doctor.

The young man and his companion were getting ready at 5 am to proceed on their march up the mountain, when they spotted the old Pandit lady struggling to walk towards them, through the dark early morning mist and the snow on ground. She had brought two *chapattis* and some cooked potatoes wrapped in tiny muslin cloth and putting them into the hands of the young man said, "On your way up, you will feel very hungry, eat this and when you reach the top, you will meet the army men, ask them for water, they will melt some snow that you must drink. Go in peace and God be with you."

This young man now in his 80s recalls this touching experience with the old lady, with tears in his eyes. The hospitality ingrained in our culture has many such tales to its credit. The young man reached his destination but instead of taking a job did something unusual for a Kashmiri Pandit. He became an entrepreneur and a very successful one too, in the textile capital of Surat. His name Pt CL Sapru is well known in the textile industry of Gujarat.

Mirth and Marriage

GLIMPSES OF KASHMIR'S CULTURE

My marriage in 1929 would typify any average Kashmiri marriage of the olden days (upto 1960s).The migration of the Pandit community from 1989 onwards and increased urbanization, characterized by its fast track life, has rendered several of the customs mentioned below almost irrelevant and redundant today. Some families though, keen to preserve the richness of old culture, manage to observe the ancient customs even in today's fast paced life.

When I was 18 and busy preparing for my university examination, my elder step- brother who had assumed the role of the family head, after the demise of my father, would call me often to be presented before men I had never seen before. These I learnt were the professional matchmakers. None but my step brother could talk to them, my poor mother was just a silent spectator and so was I, for it was the protocol, only the eldest could speak and decide for everyone in the family.

The marriage fixed, the family house became a noisy busy hub of all the Parimoo families living in that big house at Purshyar, Srinagar. To add to the chaos the whole of my step sister's

family ,normally residing a few kilometres away also joined the crowd at our house.

A colourful shamiana was erected in the spacious courtyard to provide space for the merriment of the ever increasing number of guests. A large number of wagiv (plural of wagoov) were used to cover the ground. Wagoov is matting made of a special dried weed growing wild in the numerous marshy areas of Kashmir. The surface of this wagoov is smooth and thickness better than that of simple jute matting. The same dried weed was used to make the highly affordable and popular footwear in the shape of a sandal, called pulhor which proved to be the ultimate slip-proof footwear while walking on snow, fresh or frozen.

The modest wagoov was further covered with the rich carpets in a corner reserved for the family elders, seniors and special guests. The festive atmosphere became evident about 10/12 days before the declared marriage date. Evenings saw all the neighbours and some relative or the other, dropping in to wish a successful event and offering any help that may be needed. After dinner many ladies would form a big group and sing songs of merriment using the common Tumbakhnari and pitcher. The elderly ladies not able to keep pace with the young ones would start the languorous Vedic hymns called Vanvun. The music and mirth of ladies and children would continue till past midnight. Then someone would broach the subject of the legendary Kashmiri thief named Bishtak, who was supposed to be on prowl after midnight choosing particularly the houses where marriage preparations were going on, as such households had cash and jewellery in plenty. The strange, incredible exploits of Bishtak would silence the mirthful ladies, who would then start

disappearing, one after the other, and vanishing into the safety of their bed rooms.

The first big formal evening was *manziraat*; I was stripped of my clothes and made to stand on a little chowki, a wooden short legged stool, with just a loin cloth covering my private parts. First, water and milk was poured over me, followed by rubbing of some flour, while mehendi, henna was being prepared to a desired consistency. The women folk were busy applying the same to their hands and feet and at last the thick dark paste was applied to my hands and feet too. Right from the beginning of the ceremony a group of women presided over by a senior lady had commenced the slow, long drawn, languid tunes of *vanvun*. The atmosphere was filled with an exotic aroma caused by burning of *Isband* (*Rue*) seeds in various *kangris*, the famous Kashmiri mobile firepot. This aroma is supposed to ward off the evil spirits besides the more practical use of a mosquito repellent and a deodorant.

This romantic tradition of Kashmiris singing *Vanvun* indulged in only by ladies is very rarely heard nowadays, may be for want of ladies who know how to sing it.

The origin of *Vanvun* is steeped into ancient history of Kashmir and has been a carriage for preserving of our ancient spiritual beliefs. In essence it consists of prayers in form of folk singing. Various ceremonies have various *Vanvun* songs, like *dapun* when visits are made to invite relatives, *Manziraat kroor* when coloured rice flour is artistically used to make auspicious patterns and symbols like Hindu Om and swastika; *Devgon* the ritual purification of both the bride and the groom at their respective homes follows the *manziraat* and they all have their

distinct prayer songs. *Vanvun* singing on *Devgon* is thought to be a religious must for the Pandit families.

Interestingly the Kashmiri Muslims have retained *vanvun* though in a little modified form and by substitution of certain *Sharda* words by some Farsi words. The *vanvun* and other marriage songs of Hindus and Muslims are otherwise almost identical. The Hindus sing them in '*vilambit*' or elongated tune while the Muslims sing them in a faster tone. This rebuts the claim of many that Islam swept away all the ancient cultural heritage of Kashmiris who accepted Islam.

Frequent cups of *kehwa chai* were sipped till late at night by all the participants and the elderly onlookers. This whole leaf tea is specially prepared in Samovars, a central Asian contraption adopted in Kashmir since ages. Small cinnamon pieces and small cardamom are used to flavour the brew; lightly crushed almond imparts a garnishing. No milk is added to this tea. The tradition bound Pandit would have his *kehwa* or *Mogal chai* only from a *khasu*, a brass cup without a handle, edges gently tapered outwards to facilitate very slow sipping.

It seems several samovars were being used simultaneously from morning till late at night owing to constant demand for the *kehwa* by a large number of guests.

A few demanding elders did ask for *Sheer chai* the salted tea with milk and a dash of cream, ostensibly to help their weak digestion but more as an appetizer for a hearty dinner that would follow.

Sheer chai too is a full leaf tea but of smaller size. It is prepared with addition of a little salt and a pinch of soda bicarb. The decoction needs to be well boiled before addition of milk and in some cases a dash of cream.

Muslims generally prefer it to *Mogal chai*. This tea finds particular favour when people go on picnics to witness almond blossom or cherry blossom, may be because the colour of tea matches the hue of blossoms and thereby enhances the pleasure of the outing.

Coming back to *Manziraat* celebrations, a starter, prelude to the dinner was soon served, in the form of *Var* an extra thick rice gruel with small pieces of a sheep's intestine cooked with rice and flavoured with *heeng* (*asafoetida*) besides other exotic spices. The best part of *Manziraat* started after everyone had finished their dinner. The musicians who were so far waiting in the wings came to fore now. They were five or six of them with one very girlish looking young man, dressed like a girl and wearing the ornaments and make up of a girl. He was the *bachcha*, a boy who dances as a girl would, to the fast and energetic beats of *chhakkri*, an ancient form of Kashmiri music especially popular with the peasants and workers as also with young men and women, in fact liked by all except the pretentious high brows.



The typical costume of a Kashmiri Pandit lady
(now rarely worn).

The instruments used then were same as are used even today: terracotta pot called *naot*, *tumbakhnari*, a terracotta round hollow, narrowing to an open ended tube on one side and the sheep skin firmly glued to the wider mouth, a *sarangi* the string instrument, all predating advent of Islam into Kashmir. These coupled with a much later day import from Afghanistan called a *rabaab*, greatly altered and refined by the Kashmiris, were the instruments played by the group. I specially recall one lyric they sang as it retains its popularity even today:

Katyuchhukh nundbanye, walo mashok myaaney

Where art thou my beloved, come to me

Shoraaban pyala baryo, gulaban maal karyo

Will fill goblets of wine, make rose garlands for you

Pagah kalikyath maryo, walo mashok myaaney

Tomorrow or day after might be too late, for I might be
dead. My beloved come to me

The musical night advanced into early morning, none except the children were asleep or even showing signs of feeling sleepy. The wildly dancing *bachcha* was all sweat but showed no signs of tiring out. An interval was called for by the white bearded head musician, a graceful dignified *musalmaan* who so far had given the lead singer role to his immediate assistant.

Kehwa was served and the inevitable hookah passed around, the singers got ready for yet another session. It seemed we were coming to some serious business as the *bachcha* was signalled to occupy a discreet corner.

To the fore moved the dignified elderly Khwaja Ahad Mir, reputed to be a leading Sufiana musician of those days. An instrument which was in wraps so far was uncovered; it was the famous Kashmiri *shyup*, more commonly known as santoor.

This instrument is an essential accompaniment to Sufiana music and musicologists say that Kashmiri Santoor with its 70-100 strings can replicate all the sounds of a piano.

Mir Sahib while singing, went into a trance like condition so did all who listened with rapt attention. It was only the chirping of birds heralding the first rays of sun that seemed to wake up the audience to the fact that the night was over and a hectic day lay ahead. The music stopped, the trance was broken and people started getting up to go their respective ways.

Next day was *Devgon*, a religious function lorded over by the learned priests who were assisted by the ever busy and harried women of the household. Sanskrit *shlokas* and *mantras* were chanted by the priests so that I the groom, would be spiritually equipped to be a responsible householder.

On the third day which was the day of the marriage, I was dressed in a long gold coloured *achkan*, buttoned at the neck and flowing down to my knees. Tying of the turban in Sikh fashion was undertaken by the fashion connoisseur of the family, the husband of my step sister.

A peacock feather decorated subtly with a few pearls was affixed to the turban in mid centre, slightly at a rakish angle. Tight white trousers called *churidars* and a *gurgabi*, the typical flat Indian shoe completed the bride groom's ensemble.

Leaving the dressing room, I was led to the *wyug*, a multi coloured circular diagram replete with religious symbols of the Indian *swastika* and *omkar*, made out of coloured rice flour and lime.

The senior ladies, in my case my step brother's wife and my step-sister, did *aarti* with lighted oil lamps in a *thali* rotated over my head. My poor mother wasn't around, I spotted her far behind in the crowd trying to catch a glimpse of me, her only son.

Following this a Muslim gentleman came to me with a pair of doves, circling them over my head he let them free to fly away, of course back to his own house. The pair of doves represented the Hindu god Shiva and his consort Shakti.

From here I was led to the main gate of our house where an elegantly decorated horse which belonged to a cousin of my father, was waiting for me to ride upon. While walking to the gate and the horse a group of Pandit ladies were singing *vanvun* and another group of Muslim ladies were singing *rauf*. I recall them singing, "*Yei chhuyi Mogul bachcha- kona van-vaes*", this groom is like a Mogul lad, why should we not sing for him.

The horse took me to the *ghat* on river Jhelum followed by the marriage procession including the ladies who were singing.

At the *ghat* a long boat was waiting for me. There were about a dozen boatmen in their red liveries on the two sides of the boat. In the centre just behind my seat stood their leader, a tall handsome fellow with a red uniform and plenty of brass buttons and a multi coloured turban round his head. The male relatives were seated on both my sides, as no lady was supposed to accompany a *baraat* (the groom's marriage procession).

Soon the boat was pushed and the rowing started to the accompaniment of

Ya shah, padsha, here comes the *padshah*. Though our destination was quite near, the head boatman insisted on carrying us much further downstream to Zainakadal, the 3rd bridge. This was out of their respect and faith on the legendary King Zain-ul-Aabidin who is still venerated by Kashmiris. From the *ghat* of Zainakadal the mausoleum of Zain-ul-Aabidin reverently called Badshah, is clearly visible and the boatmen raised slogan "Badshah- Padshah".

Having paid their respects to the late sultan the boatmen turned around to row against the current till we reached the destination Bana Mohalla *ghat*. There the horse and about 200 of my relatives forming the marriage procession were waiting having reached the bride's place on foot quicker than my boat journey via Badshah mausoleum. Riding the horse again I along with the marriage procession reached the bride's home, well decorated with *shamianas*. About a hundred well dressed men, some in graceful Kashmiri *phirans* and *dusaas*, others in *achkans* were waiting for us. The womenfolk of the bride's relatives, crowding the windows of their house, were singing *vanvun* and satisfying their curiosity of how the groom and his *baraatis* looked.

I was conducted to their compound where I had to again stand on a *wyug*, described earlier. My fellow *baraatis* were taken for lunch where they were served with many kinds of vegetables and *paneer* on a thick bed of basmati rice. The food was served in disposable terracotta dishes called *tabich*, a smaller and shallower variant is called *tok*. The guests had to sit cross-legged on the well carpeted floor for about 20 minutes till all the dishes could be served one after the other.

While the guests were busy having a sumptuous lunch, I was performing the several mandatory *pujas* constituting the *lagan* ceremony. At last the bride was brought and seated next to me on my left. Flower petals were showered on us, a ceremony called *poshi puja*; we held each other's hands and exchanged rings. The *Pandit jis* did all the chanting and perhaps exchanged even the marriage vows for us! At last carrying my bride under the strict supervision and the watchful eyes of my brother we left back for my home in the same decorated long boat which had brought us to this place.

Reaching home, I found the door locked, my sister had played a customary trick and wouldn't let me in unless I paid her some money, which I happily did.

My mother couldn't conceal her joy anymore and made a sudden dash forward to hug me and my bride but the looks on the faces of my step sister and my brother's wife, explained it all, my mother had broken an unwritten protocol.

I was tired and exhausted, next day early morning at 5 am, I had to catch a bus, from what is now called, Lal Chowk , for journey to Lahore (now Pakistan) where I had to appear for my supplementary examination in philosophy. I did not even see the face of my bride!

On my return from Lahore I along with some 20 of my nearest relatives was invited for a dinner at my in laws' place. I don't remember whether it was *satrath* or *ghar atschun* function, however what I remember was the great Kashmiri dinner that was served to us. Mostly meat preparations cooked in the best of Kashmiri traditions: there was *kalia*, cooked in big earthen pots called *deig*, and served by means of wooden ladles. Rogan josh followed; it is cooked by frying the mutton in *ghee*

so it turns crisp and brown then cooking it in a gravy with condiments like cloves, red chilli powder, *garam masala*, a little turmeric, and salt to taste.

We had *chok tscharvan*, small pieces of sheep's liver with little gravy but a delicate lightly sour taste.

Yakhni is mutton cooked in yoghurt (curds) with gentle spices like fenugreek to flavour it. Most favour it now as a soup but it is wise for the health conscious to remember that this dish is rich in fats.

The very popular *matsch*, minced meat in the shape of small thick rolls and served with rich red thick gravy, is my favourite and I unashamedly ate several servings of this dish despite the sharp looks of my thick moustached step-brother who thought my behaviour very unbecoming of a *maharaza*, the groom.

For vegetables there was a dream dish of *kanaguchhi*, cooked in yoghurt. Morels as these are called in English; this fungus grows wild in forests of Kashmir during thunderstorms. I have myself witnessed it emerging out of ground during a thunderstorm on Gulmarg hills. Its rarity makes it very costly; the latest I heard it was selling for Rs 5000/- a kilogram in Srinagar.

The famous *dum aloo* is a must for every Kashmiri feast. This is a unique Kashmiri dish made from peeled and boiled potatoes which are deep fried and cooked under pressure in a rich spicy sauce. Though cooked widely, the authentic taste is missed by most, except the master cooks.

Monji, variously known as *knolkohl* or *kohl rabi*, is very common and a very popular vegetable of Kashmir. We also cook its green tender leaves called *monji haakh*.

Lotus roots are found abundantly in Wular and Dal lakes. It is another dish eagerly looked forward to, particularly when the menu is all vegetarian. We were served these as *nadir churma*, spicy and crisp, deep fried like the potato fingers but much tastier. The lotus stem of Kashmir is superior to what is available in the plains of India, though the Chinese variety is still better. The great fondness of Kashmiris for this vegetable prompted Pt Nehru to refer to Kashmiris as lotus eaters in one of his books, probably, an oblique reference to Lord Tennyson's poem of *Lotus Eaters*:

"All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full faced above the valley stood the moon.
Dark faces pale against rosy flame
The mild eyed melancholy lotus eaters came,
Branches they bore of that enchanted stem."

We were also served the highly spiced *monji achar* a sour *knolkohl* preserved in fuming mustard oil.

The typical *wazwaan* of Kashmir is a culinary import from Andijan (Farghana), now in Uzbekistan, in 15th century AD. Several chefs serving the Begs and Mirza chiefs found it more lucrative to cater to Sultans and governors of Kashmir who were the chief patrons of this culinary art and its tantalising dishes. A typical *wazwaan* incorporates all the above mentioned dishes that had been served to us by my in laws, but in addition incorporates several others that the old conservative Pandit families did not like to cook. The preparation of these dishes,

necessarily involves use of garlic and shallot and the red juice obtained from a variety of coxcomb, all these being taboo to the conservative Brahmins.

An elaborate *wazwaan* could offer 30 to 40 courses.

Some of the most popular dishes of a typical *wazwaan* include the spongy, smooth, meat balls cooked in a rich red sauce (*rista*) or in a white fragrant sauce (*goshtaba*).

The boiled and then deep fried in *ghee*, ribs of sheep are called *kabar gah*. Add to these unforgettable preparations like *tabak maaz*, *aab ghost*, and the inimitable *Harissa* and you have a full-fledged *wazwaan*.

Kashmiris by and large are not too fond of sweets. The only dessert, typically Kashmiri in character is *phirni*, served cold in small terracotta plates. It is made of rice flour, milk and sugar.

Kashmiris had an admirable way of financially helping each other at the time of a marriage in a family. It was called *wura bhal*. The head of each invited family would make a voluntary cash gift to the host.

Any pen portrait of a society remains incomplete if it fails to describe the most important festivals of that society.

The festivals are primarily religious in character and therefore, different in different religious groups. But there are some commonalties. Distribution of *tahar*, the cooked yellow rice on festive occasions is common between Hindus and Muslims. Night long singing of hymns in praise of the divine is another common feature. The annual Urs or commemorative days of various saints are also celebrated jointly by all the social groups with due reverence. The Hindus of the valley are called

Kashmiri Pandits or Bhattas meaning in Sanskrit the honoured one. The important festival that has become their identity is the celebration of Shivratri. The manner in which it was celebrated in Kashmir was quite different an affair as how it is observed now outside Kashmir. It falls anywhere between the last week of February to any time in the beginning of March depending on the Saptrishi calendar as followed by Kashmiri Pandits. The revelries then lasted three to even ten days indulged in by men, women and children. Fish was the most popular item on the menu, followed by mutton.

A few Vaishnavite, the vegetarian families, however stuck to a vegetarian menu during the Shivratri festival too. I would play cards with my friends while my children and women of the home would play the *koris*, the sea shells. But gambling on the sly was not unknown.

The intense cold and snowfall during this period was considered an auspicious sign.

Many of the older generation felt visibly depressed if it didn't snow on Shivratri, thinking lack of snowfall was portent of evil times to come.

Legend has it that one Afghan governor called Jabbar Khan who was very ruthless to Pandits, ordered that Shivratri or as Pandits call it *Herath* be observed in the month of *Haar* corresponding to the month of July which happens to be the hottest month in Kashmir. The Pandits bowing before the wishes of the tyrant had to observe *Herath* in July and legend has it that, to the surprise of all, it did snow on that day. Fact or fiction but it led to the currency of a new saying which is remembered till today by Kashmiris: *Jabbar jhanda haars ti karun wanda*.

The wretched Jabbar changed the peak of summer to winter.

The mythological belief is that Lord Shiva partook of meat and intoxicating drink *som rus* on this occasion. One section of the Shaivaites called *Vaam Panthis* went even further, by intoxicating themselves and dancing naked on this occasion, of course in well secured rooms.

The migration from Kashmir has greatly reduced the charm and observance of this festival. The families and friends having been so widely scattered, this is the time when every adult Kashmiri feels uprooted, melancholic and his thoughts go back to what was his but is no more.

Teel Ashtami

A fortnight or so after observance of Shivratri we have the festival which marks the end of bitter cold. Oil lamps are lighted around the homes in memory of the deceased ancestors. *Kangris*, described elsewhere, are collected, their earthen pots broken, a rope tied to these and dried hay filled in. This then is set on fire and whirled over the head, singing songs like *jatun tun*. The atmosphere gets very exciting, a mood of fun and frolic overtakes the usually sedate Pandit as the night advances. Children and adults alike make merry.

But in older times this brought to surface some nasty traits too of our people.

There lived a gentleman named Pt Dina Nath Dilgir near Raghunath temple on the bank of river Jhelum. A relative of his living in his house as a tenant had earlier lived in Lahore for several years and couldn't speak Kashmiri fluently. To eliminate

the chances of his mail getting miss- delivered he had a small wooden letter box nailed to his front door.

This proved to be the poor fellow's undoing. For his neighbours it was something odd and exhibitionist, so they started calling him Pt Letter Box. His wife's name was Vishri. On the occasion of this festival when all disposable *kangris* had been burnt, and the mood of revellers had considerably elevated, they, in a small procession would head towards his home and sing in a chorus, right in front of his home:

Vishr wachh yaarbal, khorna chhanith khraav

Vishri jal khas letter box aav.

Vishri went to river ghat wearing her wooden slippers,
Vishri make haste, letter box has come home.

This became a ritual on every *teel ashtami* to the great embarrassment of the poor couple. They alone were not the victims of such lowly entertainment; there were several such Pandit households around Habba Kadal area alone, who had to suffer the indignities of the miserable night.

Bhaanda Jeshan

In 1957 when the Festival of Kashmir (Jashan e Kashmir) was held by the state government, to present Kashmiri culture on a platform, I was put as district in charge of Badgam. The village of Wahthore is the nerve centre of Bhaand culture, famous for its musicians and poets. It is located in Badgam district and I had to spend quite some time there selecting and coaxing the best of them so as to have a master artist in each department to participate in this festival.

Their eventual performance proved my unspoken fears, to have been unfounded. I was proud to see my team of *Bhaands* from Wathore making a brilliant success of this festival. It was they who regaled the audience with ready wit, pun, play upon words and retort, all mostly delivered with musical accompaniment and suitable gestures. This school is typical of Kashmiri music. A *Bhaand* has to be a dancer, an actor, an acrobat and also a musician, all rolled into one. The instruments the *Bhaands* use are *shehnai*, *dhol*, *nagara* and *thalij*. Kashmir has a tradition of very rich folk songs which depict the emotions, feelings and sensibilities of a common man as also troubles and tribulations faced by him from time to time. Floods and famines have been vividly described in these songs by the *Bhaands*.

Ladi Shah, the other popular music form of Kashmir, is a one man singing, like the bards. They mainly appealed to the villagers. Ladi Shah sings in the fashion of a ballad, comic and satirical. Even ridiculous and bitter situations are presented with telling effect. The one and only instrument they use consists of what is called a *dhukar* about one meter long with little brass ring plates.

Some of the great composers of Ladi Shah songs have been late Hakim Habibullah, and late Munawar Shah.

The following few lines of Ladi Shah, I remember, are from my childhood days, but are still popular in Kashmir:

*hawai jahaaz aaw mulki Kashmir, yimav wuchh timav kor
toba takseer*

*Zuni vona rajas tufaan chhu yiraan, yimav wuchh timav
kor toba' takseer*

*ganti hish naliya peth grayi maraan
shor chhus yota zan kan chiran*

*The aircraft has come to land of Kashmir, whoever saw it
begged mercy of god
The lady, Zuni, told raja a storm is brewing
It is gyrating like a kite
The noise and thunder is piercing the ear drums, beg the
mercy of God.*

An attractive dance with rhythmic beats and steps, accompanied by lively music is prevalent in Ladakh. This suggests there must have been a dance system in vogue during the Buddhist period in the valley also, if not earlier, which became a taboo after the advent of Islam, when only men were allowed to perform publicly. The melodious group dance called *Rouf* as also *Veegya Natchun* on the occasion of marriages and *yajnopavit*, Brahmin thread ceremony, lend credence to the idea of an ancient dance tradition in the valley.

Despite the gaiety, a slow paced life style and mirth of life in the valley, material demands of life necessitated compliance to the rules and demands of a rigidly organised system. One either followed the diktats of the harsh system or got left in the sea of anonymity. So at a great personal sacrifice I had to leave my home to attend the call of duty in the far off freezing desert of Ladakh also called the Land of the Fallen Moon.

Footnotes:

1. The well organised classical system Sufiana Kalam or the sayings of the Sufi saints has different Ragas and usually the sayings of Lalded the great poetess of Kashmiri language are sung in the beginning of each Raga. In recent times we have had a few great exponents of Sufiana Kalam. Mohd Abdullah, Tibbet Baqal and Ghulam Mohd Qalinbaf were among the prominent ones.
2. The ancient but little known Saptrishi calendar of Pandit society, according to which we are now in the year 5085 is said to have commenced corresponding to the year 3076 BC. This must perhaps make it one of the World's oldest calendars in vogue and speaks volumes about the antiquity of Kashmiri culture and society. The ancient Jewish calendar Tammuz predates Saptrishi by about 700 years, a very interesting fact for the believers of Jewish-Kashmir connection.

Trek across the Great Himalayan Range

A JOURNEY TO LEH-1934

"Sweet are the uses of adversity, which like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his head". How true it is of Shakespeare to have said, and it is true for all times.

Several middle and high schools were opened in the frontier areas like Kargil and Leh which needed teachers with graduate qualification. Lesser qualified teachers were available but were not considered qualified enough to teach middle schools. At this stage I had not done my bachelors in teaching (BT) now called BEd. For this I would have to go out of Kashmir and would need some scholarship as on my own, it was impossible. Ultimately I did so from Benares Hindu University in 1939 with the facility of state scholarship.

I had completed about five years as a graduate teacher in and around the city of Srinagar.

The service rules were explicit that any graduate teacher having completed three years or more was to be deputed on what was called frontier duty.

My transfer orders to far off Leh, Ladakh, were served upon me in 1933, while I was in Pulwama, a nearby town of Srinagar.

My mother's health was in a bad condition; my wife was bedridden, suffering from the dreaded tuberculosis, as was my only surviving married sister. There was no one to whose care I could leave these three ailing ladies, who constituted my entire family.

For a couple of days my mother and I prayed together, tears rolling down our cheeks.

"More miracles are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of..."— Lord Tennyson.

Suddenly it occurred to me to approach the head of the department, the director of the education department, an Irish gentleman by the name of Mr McDermott. Hardly had I got an interview with him when he sent me away with a curt reply that either I comply with the orders or resign.

Next day, on the prompting of my mother, I again went to see this gentleman. However, at the gate of Mr McDermott's office, some unknown person, after listening to my tale of woes, suggested that I may be helped by the office superintendent of the director's office. Without losing time I rushed to meet the superintendent, Mr Abdul Rahman, a Qadiyani Muslim. I enquired about his residence and next day morning went there to see him at *namaaz*, the Muslim prayer. I sat before him at a respectable distance, while he was absorbed in his *namaaz* and I in fear, with tearful eyes, as to what would follow after he finished his *namaaz*.

Finishing his *namaaz*, he gazed at me for long and looked deep into my eyes. Very politely and in a soft voice he asked me the purpose of my visit. After listening to my woeful tale, he was deeply moved and wrote a note to the director on my application. Result: my transfer to Leh, Ladakh, was kept in abeyance for a year and I was instead transferred to nearby Anantnag, the beautiful southern town of Kashmir valley.

This encounter with Mr Rahman left a great sense of gratitude in my mind, and having come to know he was a Qadiyani Muslim, I started reading all the literature I could lay my hands on about this less known cult of Muslims. I have tried to give a few glimpses of Qadiyani belief in the footnote.

My transfer to Leh in 1933 was kept in abeyance because of the serious illness of my dearest mother and of my first wife Lilla (a lilly-like flower). However, on receiving my transfer orders once again in 1934, I had no option but to obey them and prepare for the hazardous journey to Leh, the biggest town of Ladakh province. For, disobedience of the orders would have meant the loss of job, which I could ill afford, given the employment market and my domestic conditions prevailing at that time. I settled my mother and my sister in our ancestral home of Porshiyar, Srinagar, while my wife proceeded to her maternal uncle's place.

I prepared to leave for Leh, the chilling cold desert with sparse vegetation and scarce precipitation also sometimes called Little Tibet. I was 22, having no idea of the place I was expected to go to. So I sought the guidance of some veterans, who already had been to Leh. I was advised to make this hazardous journey of about 16 long days on foot, and to engage a pony along with the pony owner, known as *racepah*.

The *racepahs* lived in the isolation of *idgah* ground in the outskirts of Srinagar city, with their ponies. For people travelling to Leh, Gilgit, Skardu, etc, this place was the transport centre and the place to select their *racepahs*, the person who held a traveller's life in his hands during this journey.

As their calling demanded, these *racepahs* were hard, keen looking men accustomed to live on the mountains and highlands, to weather hardships and exposure and live with nature in all its varying moods and manifestations. Most of them were Balti Muslims with a sprinkling of Kashmiri-speaking Galwan descendants. Their ponies were very hardy Ladakhi ponies, surefooted and resistant to the vagaries of the weather. My eyes soon caught sight of a smiling, tough young man with sharp, far-seeing eyes, tough physique and an earnest demeanour.

I decided to place myself and my life in the hands of this Balti, Yaar Khan, and subsequent events proved my judgment to have been the right one.

By way of rations for the 16-day journey, I carried 8 kg *shakarparas* prepared by my mother. The 2 kg of pure *ghee* used by her for making these *shakarparas* helped serve as a complete food and this food could be kept over a long period without deteriorating. Also, I arranged for the heaviest possible quilts for bedding and coarse woollen overcoats. A medical kit consisting of tincture iodine, some cotton wool, a few tablets of Aspirin and Unani (Greek system of medicine) powders against constipation completed my travel preparedness.

On the first day, I left Srinagar to reach Nunnar village which was six km away from Ganderbal post office the gateway to

Sind valley. I spent the night there with my college mate late Pt Jia Lal Nunri.

Next night I spent at Kangan. There I was accommodated and entertained with an open heart by a Kashmiri Pandit household who were agriculturists with big landholding. Their hospitality was well known and I was briefed about them by my friend at Nunnar. They would entertain any Kashmiri Pandit traveller journeying to or from Leh.

The stopover at Kangan was memorable. The bright moonlight was followed by a beautiful morning. I felt nature's bounty in the cool breeze, the fruit laden trees in the orchard, bunches of different flowers, the crystal clean waterfall in their garden and the walnut trees laden with walnuts. It was soothing after the sleepless night I spent, haunted by the thoughts of separation from my mother and the illness of my wife and sister. I had started suffering the pangs of homesickness and I still recall the kindness of the ladies of that household who empathised with me and also infused me with the courage to face the tortuous journey ahead, through the great Himalayan range and then on to the Ladakh Himalayas.

On my departure from Kangan, I was offered as much food, by way of walnuts, almonds and other fruits that I could carry in *tagals*, by my unforgettable Kangan hosts. The *tagal* was made of rough woollen cloth and placed on the back of the pony. Placing one loaded bag on each side balanced the sacks.

Leaving Kangan at 11 am, after a delicious lunch of rice, mushrooms and vegetables, I reached Sonamarg.

Sonamarg also known as the 'Golden Meadow' is situated at a height of 2740 m. Encircled by the snow clad peaks of the

Himalyan range of mountains and close to glaciers, this valley is a place of enchanting beauty, with the Sindh river meandering through it. I realised I was standing at the gateway to the great Himalayan range and places beyond, like Ladakh.

Sonamarg was a beautiful place, with an oval- shaped lush green tract, and rivulets running on many sides. The grassy, narrow in width flat meadow, extended for about two miles. Rich forests of silver fir, intermingled with sycamore, fringed on their borders with silver birch, cover most of the mountain side. There was a government *dak bungalow* and a telegraph office in this serene beautiful place. The telegraph master was Late Pt Prem Nath Bamzai, also an old friend from school days, who lived a lonely life in that heaven on earth, despite several runners and other facilities at his disposal. My arrival in Sonamarg was a boon to him. To meet an old classmate in that secluded corner of the world, calm and silent, though saturated with nature's beauty, was a very happy occasion for both of us. He cooked some *guchhis* (morels) and I had my first taste of *wankokur* (wild fowl), a rare delicacy. Though it was September (1934), Sonamarg was as cold as Srinagar in January. In the evening my friend Bamzai, arranged a bonfire of a special highly combustible wood called *lashi* and his Kashmiri runners sang lyrics of Mahjoor, the great immortal poet of Kashmir.

While our celebrations were going on, the gale and fury of wind outside rose in pitch howling furiously, producing frightful sounds. The runners attributed it to anger of *wav jinn* (wind devil) and many a disappearances of man and beast over these mighty mountains, were firmly believed to be manifestations of his anger.

It was more out of concern for my friend's solitary life than any curiosity that I asked him the reason for not bringing his child and wife to live with him at Sonamarg, especially when he had all the perks and facilities that a government official could ask for.

I was astonished when he dismissed my query as utter lack of observation and knowledge on my part. I found to my surprise that my friend Prem Nath chose to live the lonely life of a hermit in this lovely though lonely station of Sonmarg as he feared threat to the lives of his wife and child from the several *jinnns* believed to be abounding in that land. Such was the power and terror of this much feared demon, the *wav jinn* and it extended from Sonamarg to Zoji La pass.

Following the advice of my *racepah*, Yaar Khan, I prepared to leave for our next *padaav* (halt), Baltal, at 1 pm. The reason for late departure was that the next *padaav* at Baltal was only 14 km away.

Baltal, called the *sarai* (a medieval type of traveller's inn) of Kashmir, is the base of the continuous great Himalayan mountain range which yields a pass in a zigzag fashion at the top, known as Zoji La. La, which in Ladhakhi means a mountain with a passage to next range at the top. Zoji La pass stands at a height of 3540m and leads on to Ladakh plateau.

In addition to this, on way to Ladakh we have to cross Lamayuru and Fatu La, two major passes.

We reached Baltal at 4.30 pm where we had to pass the night in the local *sarai*. It was a little elevated green tract of land surrounded on all sides by pine trees. Deathly silence prevailed here, and not even a bird could be sighted or heard. A glacial

tract, about 14 km long, separates Baltal from the famous Hindu pilgrim centre, Amarnath cave. Some adventurous souls do dare to journey to Amarnath cave via this route; some have lost their lives, having been trapped in the fissures caused by melting of snow under their feet.

Pt Jawaharlal Nehru too dared this trip once, only to get trapped, but luckily was dragged up and rescued.

Some people there at Baltal were preparing their meals and had lighted the fires which gave a ghostly glow to the walls of the inn but welcome warmth too.

My *racepah* was very sympathetic and helpful to me in passing those dreadful hours in a totally alien world. It was here that my *racepah* encouraged me, prompting me to be brave, adventurous and attempted to mentally prepare me for the dangerous journey ahead to Drass on way to Zoji La pass. From Baltal to Drass is about 24 km journey uphill.

With words of encouragement and assurances from my friend philosopher and guide the *racepah* Yaar Khan, I girdled my waist tightly and as advised, settled on back of the pony, which to my dismay had no stirrups to rest my feet while on the pony's back. A chance glance to my right side gave me the creeps as I found nothing but a bottomless chasm there, so I made a conscious effort not to look towards my right while travelling up to Zoji La. It was a journey of total silence. I could hear not only the pony's heavy breathing but even the beatings of my own heart. Yaar Khan too had forgotten his habitual humming of romantic songs. This deathly silence was broken when we reached the top.

The view from Zoji La was breathtaking. On one side was the beautiful Kashmir valley and on the other I could see the fascinating ,mysterious land of Ladakh. A long big rock at top of Zoji La adds to its grandeur and I felt like the master of all that I surveyed.

On the other side of the pinnacle towards the frontier provinces, the descent is gradual. There are unending and heart capturing meadows of yellow, white, red, pink and violet flowers that would need a poet of Tagore's or Wordsworth's calibre to do justice to their beauty appropriately in words. This constituted a fitting reward by Mother Nature to a fatigued traveller for the pains and risks taken to reach the Zoji La heights.

After a few hours ride on these heavenly plains, I sighted at a distance a small building which was the telegraph office of Drass.

Drass is roughly 60 km west of Kargil and situated at a height of 3230 m. It is supposed to be one of the coldest of inhabited places of the world. During winter the temperature can go as low as -50 degree Celsius or even less. Frequent snow storms are a regular feature here.

From a distance of around 100 yards, I discerned two men standing as if looking for me. Yes they certainly were looking out for me, the postmaster of Sonamarg having signalled them of my expected arrival.

One of the two was a resident of Anantnag, on his way to Leh, to be my colleague in the same school to which I was transferred. He had delayed his stay at Drass by one day so as to be my fellow traveller. The dinner at Drass hosted by the postmaster, is something that I still can't forget and crave to

have once more. It consisted of *mashkrari* - cottage cheese made by the herdsmen during the summer grazing, *guchhis* (morels) and a local reddish vegetable of slightly sour taste. The *mashkrari* was fresh and a treat to taste.

Now having a fellow traveller, the next day, we started after supper for Matayan, our next stage of travel. In the course of our journey I found the initial euphoria of having a travel companion cum colleague, fading. I realised my fellow traveller had views on life and dharma, diametrically opposite of mine and he kept harping on the same theme, time and again. On every possible opportunity my companion tried to overawe me with his religious attire, his *pheran*, the big *tilak* on his forehead and the *rudrakhsha mala* which was carefully worn to display it prominently. His constant refrain about his strong beliefs in *jinaat*, the evil spirits, and ghosts of these mighty mountains not only irritated me but also scared me, as I started imagining these ghosts even in the clouds drifting above and in the deathly silence around me.

Matayan is more or less a desert. It is claimed to receive the heaviest snowfall of the area. The population is very sparse and a very lazy lot. Accommodation for the night was found in the local *sarai*, and I had my mother's *shakarparas* to fall back upon for nourishment. My co-traveller did offer me some unappetising roasted wheat flour, which I politely refused, in exchange for the *shakarparas* that I offered him.

The inn was agog with Balti and Ladakhi travellers, sitting in circles round the small bonfires lit by them to keep off the chill. But the piercing cold wind found its way through the tiniest of the chinks in the windows and closed doors.

The next *padaav* was Kargil, the district headquarters having its jurisdiction from Zoji La pass to Lamayuru, considered the gateway to Ladakh.

The pathway to reach Kargil was the most hazardous and also the longest. The travellers had to fall into a single file and walk cautiously over a narrow dirt track around the zigzag mountainous terrain.

The distance, merely 24 km, posed grave dangers to man and beast alike as a wrong step could send one hurtling down into the jaws of death, deep down in the icy waters of the river Suru. This river of mercurial rushing nature does not permit a ferry on its surface. Men may come and men may go but this river has been going on forever.

It took all the courage I could muster, to steal a long look at the ferocity with which this apparently deep river rushes onwards to its destination. At several places on this river bank, locals from nearby hamlets could be seen engaged in collecting or attempting to collect tiny gold particles. Many of them made gold-digging from the river a full time occupation. Gold around these areas was selling at Rs 18 per *tola* (a tola is slightly more than 10 gm) as against the price in Srinagar of Rs 25 per *tola*.

The slow, single-file walk resulted in our reaching Kargil late at dusk, and we thanked the Almighty for having brought us all safe and sound to our immediate destination.

Kargil (original name Purig), lies nearly 200 km to the west of Srinagar and is situated at an altitude of 2,704 m. It is the centre of three important routes of Jammu and Kashmir state. One route leads to Srinagar, the other to Leh, Ladakh, and the third to Askardu (now occupied by Pakistan). The temperature

here can fall up to -40 degree Celsius. It enjoyed an undisputed position as a trade and transit hub of the pan-Asian trade network. Trading caravans from China, Tibet, Yarkand in Chinese Turkistan and Kashmir regularly pass through this town.

The population comprises 95 per cent Shia Muslims and about 5 per cent Buddhists with a few stray Hindu traders from Himachal. Till date this area remains free from the virus of terrorists and anarchy, probably because of its population content.

The people are mostly of Tibetan race but a sizeable number of people called Arghons occupy a prominent position. They are supposed to be children of cross-marriages between the local Ladakhi women and merchants of Kashmiri and other Central Asian origins.

From Kargil to Leh there are seven *padaavs* — Kharbu, Fatula, Lamayuru, Khalasi. I can't recall the names of the other three. The journey to each was similar, uphill and down dale, sometimes on foot and sometimes on the pony.

During this journey, my companion's unending, half-baked lectures on orthodox Brahmanism made my thoughts wander towards my mother, my ailing sister and my sick wife.

I felt starved of news about them and would look up to the blue sky with the vain hope that some bird would bring me a bit of news from home, but at these heights of more than 10,000 feet, no birds flew. Something caught hold of me after leaving Fatula, I raced alone on my pony leaving my *racepah* and my companion far behind. It seems some desperation goaded me to this act of bravado or was I after all possessed by one of

those *jinn*s my companion kept haranguing about. Momentarily I forgot a man can get lost in that wilderness or even end up as a meal for the wolves. Finally I stopped at around 10 pm at a spot where a beautiful stream of water flowed. The moon was shining full and bright in the sky. After having my *shakarparas* and a long, cool drink from the stream, leaving the pony to fend for itself, I fell asleep using a small stone covered with my pony's woollen bag (*tagli*) as a pillow, alone in that beautiful wilderness.

I woke up to find myself on a big patch of green, surrounded by huge rocks, a jet black amalgam trailing down the rock surfaces at some places. Later I learnt it was *shilajeet*, the well-known Ayurvedic medicine of supposedly aphrodisiac qualities.

The howling and shouts of my pony man and the fellow traveller disturbed my sweet dreams. Both vexed their venom upon me and I had nothing but my sheepish smile to cool them down. The three of us started walking in the cool moonlight towards our next destination, Lamayuru. This *padaav* was too full of Buddhist travellers for us to be accommodated comfortably. On our entry, the crowd hailed us with salutations and a chorus of "*Juley juu*". From here onwards there was absolute dominance of Buddhists, and everyone had a prayer wheel in their hands which was constantly rotated to the accompaniment of a mantra chant "*Ohm, mani, padmani, ohm*". Their headdress covering their head as well as both ears was made of three pieces of embroidered woollen cloth. It is an appropriate dress against the piercing cold of the region.

The crowd was very hospitable to us, trying their best to accommodate us and make us feel as comfortable as they could. They offered us their staple food *grim*, a species of

coarse barley flour roasted and mixed with the salted and buttered tea .My companion, an orthodox Brahmin that he was, refused to accept it. Later as the night advanced some of the Ladakhi travellers enjoyed their *chhang*, prepared by fermentation of *grim*. A few were sipping the distilled *araq* too. So it was here in Lamayuru that we were introduced to a new but friendly culture of Ladakhi Buddhists.

From Lamayuru we left for Khalasi, the paradise of Leh.

The terrain from Lamayuru to Khalasi is plain. It is open on all sides and some pockets are covered with long sheets of soda ash, which gives a white glow to a long stretch as far as the eye can see. There are no water streams around, which give one the feeling of being in a desert of sorts. It is a good track for horse racing and some sports-minded Buddhists play polo there.

Just at the other end towards Leh is a romantic village known as Khalasi. It is one of the most attractive places I have ever been to. I would like to be born here and lead a clean, free life till my death. The inhabitants are very attractive to look at with their cheerful faces. Most of the households consist of six to seven brothers, sharing two females as wives. This mode of living and working together, cheerfully with utmost domestic peace, harmony and understanding, brought home to me the veracity of the fact that there must have surely been a Draupadi for five Pandavas, as mentioned in the great Hindu epic Mahabharata.

On our arrival, the inhabitants hailed us with jubilant exclamations of "*Juley juu*". Some youths with long hair, robed down to their feet wearing velveteen crimson head dresses came in groups to welcome us with smiling countenances. The

beautiful females amongst them had azure-coloured jewellery covering their heads. My companion with his red *tilak*, a prominent *rudra mala* around his neck and woollen *pheran* and his unshaven beard was an amusing sight to these people.

Khalasi is beautiful with its red apple and apricot orchards. It manufactures *chhang* and *araq* in plenty and uses these liberally. Instead of cows these people rear yaks, called *zamba* in Ladakhi. *Zamba* is black with a wide forehead and short face, differentiating it from the cow.

The Khalasis from Zanskar also breed horses, rather ponies, for high altitude riding and carrying of goods. Their pure-bred pet dogs like Lhasa apso, Lhasa terrier and the handsome beast of a dog known as Tibetan mastiff, come from Changthang-Lhasa.

The water is clear, cool and in abundance.

I left Khalasi with a reluctant heart on our final leg of the journey to Leh.

The part of the journey to Leh was insipid. We had to cross a desert like track of 16 km to reach the gateway to Leh. There was at that time no other entry point to Leh and my impression on entering it was as if I was entering the gate of a factory. The gate was 5 m x 10 m, through which three ponies could enter at a time. On entering the gate I found the medical officer of Leh and the telegraph master, waiting for us. They too had been informed of our arrival by log message from the Matayan telegraph master. I believed and still strongly believe that the Kashmiri community was and still is well knit. True to their hospitality the two Kashmiri families accepted me and my companion as house guests till we found our own lodgings. I

was taken in by Dr Sapru while my companion stayed with the telegraph master. Both our hosts were enjoying lots of state granted perks like assistants, *khidmatgars*, messengers, etc. After about a week both of us got accommodation in the Leh bazaar, consisting of three rooms, a kitchen and a lavatory, at the monthly rental of Rs 5.

Man's capacity to love things and places which one may have been indifferent to initially, is an essential part of the great gift God has given to mankind, called the capacity of learning. The longer I stayed in Ladakh, the more I became fond of it and its people. The more I experienced its mysteries and felt its charms, the more it grew on me. I was now yearning for more of its mystique and I did experience it.

Footnotes

1. Qadiyanis

In the late 19th century there lived in the Punjab a saintly person who claimed that he was both the Messiah of the Jews and Mahdi of Muslims. This curious sect claims that Christ never really died at the cross but was helped by true followers to disappear, "to seek that which was lost" which is inferred as meaning the "Lost tribes of Israel". It is claimed he came to Kashmir and was ultimately buried in Srinagar. About 2,000 years ago there lived in Kashmir a saint by the name of Yus Asif whose preaching and parables are very similar to the ones used by Christ. The Qadiyani sect believes that Christ and this Yus Asaf are one and the same person. The tomb of this mysterious saint lies in Srinagar and is a ziaarat, pilgrimage centre for many.

2. Historical background of Ladakh

Succumbing to relentless British pressure, Maharaja Hari Singh, the nephew of late Maharaja Pratap Singh, who had succeeded the latter in 1925, conceded the de facto control of Gilgit to the British in 1935. Chitral had been taken by the British much earlier.

However, the Maharaja was keen to tighten his grip on the territory of Ladakh and it became a matter of state policy to send as many government employees to man this territory as possible, the local manpower being unqualified and unavailable for the jobs at that time. The keenness to control Ladakh and neighbouring Kargil probably stemmed from the big revenue collection on pashmeena trade. Possibly also other not well-known, hushed up, trading activities of the silk route originating from Kabul.

This policy also greatly helped in development of this very backward area and quickened the pace of bringing the Ladakhis and Baltis into the mainstream of the state's social and political life.

Life in Leh

Ladakh is a cold desert and known as Little Tibet of India as also the land of the fallen moon. It is sparsely populated, density of population being only two per square kilometre even now. Strategically it is a very vital area, being the meeting junction of Western Asia, Russia and China with India.

The most famous Ladakhi ruler remembered to date is Senge Namgyal (1616-1642), the lion of Ladakh. He conquered Zaskar and brought it under his control. This mighty ruler built numerous monasteries including the world famous Hemis Gompa. The nine-storey building overlooking the whole of Leh and housing the Leh monastery at its top is his feat of architecture.

Leh has been and continues to be the most important town of the province. Today it boasts of an airport supposed to be at one of the highest altitudes in the world.

Ladakh, like Gilgit and Askardu, became part of Jammu and Kashmir state as a result of the spectacular conquest of Ladakh by the Dogra General Zorawar Singh in 1834, when he defeated the Ladakhi army against heavy odds. At that time Ladakh was ruled by a group of Grand Lamas of Tibet. It is said that the wazir Zorawar Singh was a born military genius and could

be compared with the likes of Napoleon and Lord Nelson. His efforts helped Maharaja Gulab Singh to annex Ladakh besides Gilgit, Chitral and Hunza to his kingdom in 1834, thereby extending the British controlled Indian domains right up to the underbelly of the erstwhile USSR component states.

Under Maharaja Gulab Singh's rule, General Zorawar Singh also brought Zaskar and Baltistan under Dogra rule. He planned to annex Tibet too. Fighting bravely at the height of 15,000 feet, his luck ran out and he met his Waterloo there. The exact place and the circumstances under which he lost his life and his army remain a historical unsolved mystery till today. It is because of General Zorawar Singh that the boundaries of India today extend to Leh, Kargil, Drass, Pangong lake and Chushul.

After my colleague and I had settled in the rented house, we planned to run a joint mess, cooking our meals ourselves on alternate days. Our friendly Kashmiri officials who were already settled in Leh arranged for us ration tickets to buy rice, kerosene and firewood at subsidized rates. These concessionary tickets were issued by the government administration only to its employees.

Having started a mess, however, brought the temperamental differences between me and my room-mate more to the surface. I hated cooking and resented his big brother attitude towards me. I felt it to be a moral lapse if I had to compromise and curb my free and rational thinking for petty gains. My taste for eating boiled eggs and using onions was a great irritant to him as it was to a large majority of the orthodox Kashmiri Pandits of that time.

I thought this would make him seek separate quarters for himself, but miserly as he was, he proposed to do all the cooking himself if I paid him Rs 3 per month and I was to eat eggs outside in the market. For me it was not a bad bargain at all; to me, cooking in the chilly cold weather when the night temperatures could go as low as -18 degrees C and worse, was a great ordeal. It could get so cold that an accidental touch with a metallic object would send an electric shock-like feeling through the body.

Vegetables were almost unknown to the local people, especially in the winter months which was eight out of 12 months of the year. Meat of yaks and horses supplemented their *grim* flour diet and many of them visited the slaughter house to drink a cup or two of animal's warm blood while it was being slaughtered. It didn't cost them anything and was considered a very nutritive source of food. This may be repulsive to many of us as it was to me, but the practice is widespread in tribal Africa particularly amongst Masai tribals of Africa. In Germany and other continental countries of Europe, they have *blut wurst*, a sausage made of an animal's (usually a pig's) fresh blood which of course is prepared hygienically with addition of some fat specks.

We, the teachers of the school including our headmaster, were supplied vegetables like cauliflower, spinach, turnips, etc, during summer months from the then only vegetable garden of Leh. Christian missionaries headed by Reverend Father Peter had developed this vegetable garden.

The only butcher in Leh was a Balti Muslim who was our landlord. The Buddhists did not slaughter the animals themselves on religious grounds but were not averse to eating

meat. Mutton was sold at roughly 6 naya paisa per 250 gm and as per today's reckoning it was not cheap, considering the incomes of common people. Even very prolonged boiling didn't help in making this mutton tender, as at higher altitudes water boils at lower temperatures. Unless a pressure cooker is used, the meat remains leathery. But in the 1920s or even in the '30s, the pressure cooker was an unheard of device. My roommate was a vegetarian and the poor fellow would leave the house in disgust whenever he saw me cooking mutton. I could understand his aversion to meat but the extreme cold weather of Leh and my eating preferences developed from childhood strongly tempted me to eat the same.

His highly orthodox, touch-me-not behaviour had irritated many a personalities in Leh and earned him their disdain. His constant moral lecturing and attempts to create a holier than thou image of a guru resulted in several of the Leh gentry thirsting to cut him down to size and expose his hypocrisy, having suspected his clandestine attraction for the wandering beauties of Leh market. Plans to ensnare him in a net woven for him were drawn with great care and secrecy. A vicious plot to catch him red-handed was finalized and unfortunately I was forced to get involved in it. Protesting my dislike of the plot, I was assured that my part in it would be of little significance; I would have to leave my house for a few hours and keep my mouth shut. Under pressure and with a hurting conscience, I obliged the schemers and the holy Brahmin was trapped in his own den in the broad daylight of a Sunday afternoon in a slanderous situation with a local woman. After this, he forgot all his high sounding moral, religious lectures. All the Kashmiri households very subtly ignored him and no doors would open to his reconciliatory visits.

Having settled myself in the rented lodgings and come to peace with my now downcast colleague over the irritating issue of my cooking eggs or using onions, I got time to look around my new world with the curiosity of youth.

There was the main and the only market street in 1934 (which had disappeared in my later visit in 1964). Bevy of young beautiful girls would be seen roaming in batches in this market street, wearing their best clothes as also the native makeup of *kajal*, chatting and endlessly giggling all the time over everything and nothing. The older, grey haired Ladakhi gentlemen, rotating their prayer wheels or fighting off the flies and the younger Ladakhis idly staring into the empty space above, had neither the time nor the inclination to look, leave aside appreciate the young girls who visibly craved for attention and appreciation.

There was a Kashmiri shop selling woollen clothes and blankets, one selling utensils, a *Yarkandi* was selling big chunks of sun-dried meat and also sun-dried vegetables.

Dried apricots from Kargil are very sweet and I used to buy them regularly.

At the eastern end of this market street there were two prominent constructions on a hill. At its base was a mosque for Muslims, who formed about 30 per cent of the town's population. Many of the Muslims were *hajjis* wearing woollen velveteen long robes with tight cummerbunds and sporting Afghani fur caps. They were the adventurous, travelling, business barons from Central Asian States. Some of their sons, my students would present me now and then with Bricks of Lhasa Tea, known as *Sabaz Chaii*, the green tea, in Kashmir, a costly delicacy used by the richest of rich Kashmiris. Here I

must confess that I used two such bricks to affect my transfer from Leh to Kargil after my second marriage.

Leh is surrounded by a dozen Buddhist monasteries, within a parameter of 10 Km .It is a life time experience to one interested in art and culture particularly of Buddhist origins. The world famous Hemis Gompa constructed by the greatest of Ladakhi rulers lies in southwest region of Ladakh, some 50 km from Leh at a wonderful location. The cleanliness and orderliness of this *gompa* was remarkable. It is studded with glistening golden pieces .In spite of multitude of visitors I found it awe inspiring, peaceful and tranquil. That was in first week of April 1935.

Overshadowing the mosque in Leh, was Leh Gompa, a big highly conspicuous seven storey construction of Buddhist architecture. There inside, Buddhist monks in their yellow-crimson robes played a round 5 metre long horn, a flute like instrument, simultaneously beating the drums, in an atmosphere rich with burning of pencil thick incense sticks. Many were just content with spinning their prayer wheels nonstop. Large sized paintings and murals adorned the walls. The art is unadulterated Tibetan style. The colours used are breathtakingly bright, mostly natural pigments having been painstakingly pulverized and then used.

The statue or a painting, of the famous Buddhist preacher Padma Sambhav was to be seen in almost all the gompas. He hailed from, the now notorious, Swat valley of Pakistan. He did penance for a long time in Bhutan in a cave called Tiger cave near the town of Paro and spread Buddhism in Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal and Ladakh.

The strong effect of Hindu *Tantrik* school of thought is very much in evidence in Ladakh, as in Bhutan. The worship of mother Goddess is next only to that of Lord Buddha in ritual importance.

This small town of Buddhist monasteries had much more fun and colour than one could ordinarily expect to find in such a far flung mountainous little town so isolated from the rest of the world. The local young women, those days, either because of poverty or permissiveness had no inhibitions to promiscuity and moved around like free lancers.

Without meaning to cast any aspersions on these freedom loving Ladakhi women, I feel the free sex attitude in life might have been influenced by the generally accepted custom of polyandry of those times in their lands. This social system has greatly contributed to keeping the population in check for a country with such meagre resources of food or fuel.

Though *muta* is a 40-day marriage contract permissible in Islam under certain well defined conditions, it was openly misused and freely followed by non Muslims too in Ladakh. One could count at least half a dozen Kashmiri Pandits who had made their lives comfortable under this Muslim law. Yet there were some educated young men, particularly of Kashmiri Pandit community who dreaded the indulgences provided by the free life style as prevalent in Ladakh that time, not only on moral grounds but for the more realistic reasons like dread of sexually transmitted diseases; the local doctors had to treat such cases in considerable numbers.

However that was then: when I revisited Ladakh in 60s it was a new and a socially evolved Ladakhi woman I observed. Educated, in western dresses teaching primary and middle

classes or engaged in several other jobs. Gone were the days of merry going giggling.

Continuing my 1934 experience of Ladakh I might add that besides freely available sex there was yet another factor of revelry for the masses there. It was *CHHANG* and *ARAQ*, the locally brewed alcoholic beverages derived from the coarse locally grown grain called Grim, available for a song. Araq was the favourite of the more prosperous. Thus the atmosphere of Ladakh then was conducive to worship of both the Cupid and the Bacchus.

The great festival of Demon mask dances is observed with gaiety for about a week in the first week of March. Besides the dances, the polo matches and archery competitions make the festival very attractive to outsiders like me.

I must mention the game of polo or *choghan* as played by Baltis in particular and Ladakhis in general. A mention also need to be made of the fact that the neighbouring Baltistan is considered to be home of Polo. All sections of the society engage in it as it is considered to be a national game. The polo ponies are well trained, following the ball at every turn and maintaining their best possible speeds and imbibing automatically the same spirit of game as their hard hitting and fast riding masters do. A man driving the ball before him is closely pursued by team mates and opponents alike, and the music is played by a band wildly. The drums and long Ladakhi horns that compose the band strike in perfect unison forcefully on each rush towards the goalpost which results in melee of the opposing teams.

The gentry of Ladakh is well known for being cheerful ,willing and good tempered, ever ready to laugh with but not to be

laughed at. Their cumulative gentle and amicable culture was generally misunderstood as weakness and timidity. Things however changed when they were awakened and guided by a Kashmiri, late Pt Shridhar Kaul Dullu, who was once my teacher as also a relative, being the brother-in-law of my sister. Pt Dullu, Assistant Inspector Schools, had a great impact on the social and political awakening of Ladakhi masses; he turned a missionary and had come in personal contact with Dalai Lama. On his initiative a Ladakhi Buddhist Association was formed for the first time in 1951. This Association fought, tooth and nail, several attempts to Islamize the mass of Buddhist population. Pt Dullu later on got officially converted to Buddhism. He passed away in 1960, but even present day Dalai Lama and the All India Buddhist Association remember him as a saviour of Buddhist majority from turning into a minority, which was the game plan of powers that were.

The commerce of Ladakh then was more international in character than it is now. About half a dozen traders from Hoshiarpur had established their business some 40 years before my arrival, that is around 1890s. One of them was Seth Shadi Lal, who imported goods from Srinagar, Punjab and Himachal in India and from Lhasa, Yarkand and Changthang in Tibet and Central Asia. The traders from Central Asian countries and Tibet were a common sight in the inns and market of Leh. The imported goods consisted of carpets, *zaharmohar* (Jade) stone, woollen blankets, pearls, gold biscuits and *heeng* (asafoetida) besides the precious Cashmere fibre for shawls. The Chinese aggression and before that the occupation of Gilgit and Askardu by Pakistani army, have brought ruin to this trade.

Leh gets very little snow or rain, though it is severely cold. From March to June there may be a few hailstorms lasting 15

minutes or so. The scenic beauty of Leh lies in its barrenness and this coupled with stillness creates a unique atmosphere of its own.

The vast uninhabited countryside is staggering and fascinating with the stillness and deadly silence. One can meet and realise one's God while crossing the long deserts of silence without even the flutter of a bird overhead.

While travelling one day through the tracts of stillness and silence, I suddenly came across regiments of wild, red, yellow, white and violet flowers like Wordsworth's *Daffodils* – *A host of golden daffodils beside the lake, beneath the trees, fluttering and dancing in the breeze. Ten thousand saw I at a glance, tossing their heads in sprightly dance.*

Stay At Leh

Ladakh is very different from the rest of India, not only in its topography but also the features of its people. Supposed to be from the original Dard stock and Indo Aryan races, today however there is little to support this theory. Even if we assume it to be correct the original race is either annihilated since long or got diluted as the Tibetan immigration increased and ultimately submerged totally the original race into a Tibetan race.

It is one of the few places where Mahayana Buddhism is still practiced, a mix of Bon faith and Tantra of Hinduism believed to have been introduced into Ladakh in 7th century AD by Tibetan monks, and more particularly by Padma Sambhava.

Life in Leh, for that matter in all of Ladakh is woven with the warp and weft of superstition, meditation and the ethereal

make-believe. The strong influence of Tantrik religion is all pervasive. It surrounds and engulfs a man even if he may not believe it.

I have been carrying the memory of an incident that I never have shared with anyone except one, for fear of being laughed at and even ridiculed by my more rationalistic friends who would discard the episode as a hallucination. One may ascribe it to the vast stretches of lonely plateaus, the rarefied atmosphere which makes man lethargic and dreamy or may be the place is really abounding in formless life, spirits if you may call them. It didn't occur to me that I was having an unusual experience when it happened to me.

On a Sunday, the sun was bright and an urge overcame me to visit a small Buddhist monastery, perched high up on a hill not too far from Leh bazaar. I never failed to look at it whenever I walked around in the bazaar, it seemed to me the little monastery was watching me every time and all the time while I was in the bazaar.

Finishing an early breakfast I left for my intended destination, I had to go; the urge was getting too irresistible I felt the monastery was calling me and I felt helpless to resist its call.

Taking the pathway to the hill I was walking lost in my thoughts of how intriguing this land, aptly called the piece of fallen moon, was. I was going round a bend of the hill, when the little *gompa* was hidden from my view and I saw a few yaks nibbling at the tiny patch of green grass on the shoulder of the path. Some distance away I saw a ramshackle two-storey house, made of rough round stones and mud, old brown with age, wooden logs made for the beams. On an impulse I thought of knocking at the door of the house to seek a short cut to the monastery and

exchange a few friendly greetings, *juley jus* to the inhabitants of this house. While I was hesitating in front of the door and still debating if my presence wouldn't be considered a rude intrusion, the door opened and I faced a smiling girl dressed in the traditional Ladakhi *goncha*. Her hair was woven into long fine plaits but I was astonished to note her features which were anything but Ladakhi. With her big sharp eyes, a fine nose and sharp features she looked like a Gujjar or a beautiful *pahari* girl. To my query she said her name was Nadia. Asking me to wait before I could have said my goodbye, she disappeared into the house and soon came with a long metallic glass full of yak's milk. Hesitatingly I drank the milk which didn't taste bad though it had no sugar. She pointed towards the yaks grazing nearby and talked about them and the mountains and her parents who had gone to the Leh bazaar to visit some relatives and so many things that could be of least interest to me in ordinary circumstances. I forgot to ask what I had come to ask for, the way to the monastery. I felt tired and incapable of walking anymore I kept looking at her as if in a trance, very reluctantly I asked her to spread some sheet outside where I could rest a while. Laughingly she told me I would be dead if I was left at that place, where soon very chilly winds, the *wav jinn*, would be blowing with fury and vengeance. She caught me by my hand and despite my feeble protests she dragged me inside the house asking me to lie down in a corner. She stood there smiling mysteriously down at me. How long our eyes locked, I have no idea about, for I was unaware of the world around me, I must have slept but for how long could I have slept? When I woke up it was early morning and there were neither yaks around nor any other sign of life, I had a tattered *goncha* thrown over me and the house door was blocked with a big wooden plank nailed on both sides to the door frame. Some

roasted *grim* powder had been very thoughtfully left for me in a little bowl and an earthen jug of water. With my eyes downcast and head spinning, I traced my steps very slowly back to my rented accommodation in Leh bazaar. Stopping at the barber's shop I enquired which day it was and got shocked to be told it was Tuesday. Now my immediate problem was how to explain my absence for two days. However I found my superior a very understanding soul, who hearing my shocking story and after giving me a long sharp look, commented, as if to no one in particular, "Yes anything mysterious can happen around here!" After that, I never looked back to see the monastery at the little hill, I did not have the courage to do so, but I did wonder if it still was there!

My headmaster cautioned me not to lift any of the innumerable round stones lining long stretches of the road, with the Buddhist mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum* carved on them. It is strongly believed anyone lifting such a stone meets some ugly misfortune. I enquired about these stones when I revisited Leh in 60s, the belief still continues. In fact it has gained more credibility after some army officers on duty in Ladakh did return these stones from far off places at one time or the other. Anyone taking a stone with this *mantra* '*om mani padme hum*' carved on it as a souvenir from these places, is said to be visited by some misfortune. The legend has it that these stones were carved and their rough edges smoothened by convicts in ancient times, as part of their punishments.

The convicts who for some reason failed to achieve their prescribed targets were, it is said, subject to inhuman treatments. One such punishment meted out to the worst offenders would be to put them into a bag made of fresh animal hide, stitch the bag and leave it out in the open to gradually

shrink and choke the unfortunate man, whose hands and feet were tied, to die a slow merciless death.

Remote and lonely, a spot high up in the Himalayas is Leh, the capital of Ladakh; even though at that time it was bustling with activities absolute calm prevailed at the surface.

Seth Shadi Lal, mentioned earlier too, was the stockist of rice, sugar, edible oils, kerosene oil etc. All the powerful officers like *wazirwazarat*, *tehsildar*, district judge, and superintendent of police besides the lesser officials like the doctor, telegraph master or the postmaster took pride in being close friends of the Seth. I often wondered if all this clout of the Hoshiarpur businessman could be for his absolute hold on all the essential supplies of Leh or for something subtler and more secret. The other personality of Leh of the times was one Muslim officer simply known as the British agent. His office was established in the *sarai*, where Yarkandis, Tibetans, Changthangis and other foreigners from Central Asia would arrive to sell their goods in the wholesale market. Trade was brisk in carpets, *zaharmohar*, *namdas*, woollen blankets, pearls, gold nuggets and *heeng* (*asafoetida*), the spice of mountains.

The British agent was very sociable and would call upon almost all the government servants. He was very fond of playing chess and other indoor games. He would accept and welcome any excuse to ingratiate with any person of whatsoever importance in the official hierarchy, moving from place to place obviously seeking information. Playing chess with me he grew fond of me for my knowledge of Persian poetry. However I could never let down my guard with him for I suspected that this political agent, as he was called, was keeping tabs on the doings of the Dogra rulers and it was believed by my friends that the

powerful trader Seth Shadi Lal was the maharaja's checkmate to the British agent.

In hindsight, I feel there was something more sinister to the brisk trading activities in Ladakh and Kargil, than met the eye. The traders, who made their appearances in Leh or the other international land route trade junction of Kargil, were very rich people. They had their own security guards very discreetly following them and they were generous with their gifts and tips. This was the period of China's great opium deluge. It could be that opium wrapped in colourful carpets was finding its way across the international borders as it is now. The opium cauldron of Afghanistan was as full and overflowing then as it is now. Afghani opium could easily travel through Leh to the then province of Chinese Turkistan (now called Xinjiang) and finally to Peking and other cities. To me this trade could have been more important a reason for the British to take control of Gilgit and Chitral, rather than the declared aim of fortifying the borders of their Indian empire against a perceived Tsarist Russian threat. This route definitely was shorter and easier for their drug trade than that of the well known sea route from Calcutta to Hong Kong.

Leh is generally free from snow, unlike Kargil or Srinagar; the former is situated at 9000 feet and the latter at 5700 feet above sea level. On the other hand, Leh, the roof of the world, is 11500 feet above sea level.

I recall with shudder the piercing needle pricks of darting cold that would manage to come into our almost sealed rooms through the tiniest chinks. All the schools are closed for winter vacation. But this winter vacation was unofficially observed even by the revenue and police officers, calling their subordinates to

their residence for work. These officers enjoyed life like little Rajas. Some of them without families renewing *muta* contracts every forty days with the best local beauties around.

RETURN JOURNEY TO SRINAGAR

My journey to Leh was long and tedious but the return journey was faster but fraught with maximum danger. This unusual trip was necessitated by the news through telegram of my (first) wife's death in March 1935. The passage from Drass to Baltal, with Zoji La pass dividing the valley of Kashmir and frontier provinces, remains snowbound till the end of April. The faint hope of crossing Zoji La, of course at the risk of one's life, lies in the last week of April or May when Zoji La is free from snow fall but gets paved with frozen, slippery ice sheets. The entire area from Zoji La down to Baltal is glistening in sun with this glass like hardened ice. The risky chance entails slipping over these frozen ice sheet slopes of Great Himalayan mountain range, a four km almost vertical fall from Zoji La to the base at Baltal. To undertake this adventure one has to engage two guides- "*racepahs*".

I dared this, not in a spirit of adventure of brave hearts but by an irresistible urge to meet my lonely mother at Srinagar, to boost her morale after the death of my wife and the desertion by my step brother who chose to live with his married sister. Thus my mother was left frustrated and all alone. At the time of this adventure I was 24 years old.

I was wrapped in a *yarkandi namda* and then covered with dried buffalo hide.

After being blindfolded I was laid on this hide and *namda* wrap. One guide held my head in his two hands, my head facing the

sky, the other *racepah* laid under my feet with his head firmly pressed against my feet. Both the racepahs were covered with hides and *namda* linings. All set to go and a final prayer by them to Allah, then a *Bismillah Rehman e Rahim*, with the name of Allah the most beneficent and the most merciful ----a push and the great slip started, we were almost plunging at speeds never before experienced by me. All I felt was that I was skating on my back with no control sticks in my hands and at that great speed, the concept of time was gone. The only thought I had was -Would I or wouldn't I make it?

It might have been 40 minutes or even an hour when the race down the great slope slowed and finally stopped. I had survived the great slide! Thanking the almighty, I resumed my uneventful journey from Baltal to Srinagar, back to my mother and a new life.

My first visit to Ladakh was to a place beautiful in its wilderness. It was a society having liberal views of relationships and a Bohemian outlook on life. Providence provided me a second chance to visit Ladakh again in 1960. The sight of a new Ladakh with a changed society and a changed topography amazed me. New life styles had created new challenges.

Leh revisited

When talking of modern Leh the foremost name that comes to mind is of Koushik Bakoula. He was the main representative of Ladakh province in Jammu and Kashmir Government continuously, for a few decades, through various ministries of Sheikh Abdullah, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and Sadiq, till he was appointed as India's ambassador to Mongolia. His presence at the helm of Ladakhi affairs opened the doors of Ladakh to a modern society, though he continued to be the head of the Ladakhi Buddhist hierarchy. His determination played an important role in helping the Ladakhi people sustain their ancient Buddhist religion in the controversial political environment of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Bestowed with a sense of real politic and an understanding of grass root realities the Rev. Koushik Bakoula became a guiding spirit for Ladakhi people trying to adapt to the new changed circumstances while preserving the rich traditions and customs inherited from their ancestors. He guided Ladakhis through a combination of traditional and modern education and is rightfully called "The Architect of Modern Ladakh". Besides Rev. Bakoula took great part outside the Kashmir state in the affairs of the Hindu Scheduled castes who are taking to Buddhism in progressively large numbers.

Born on May 21st, 1917 into a noble family of Ladakh, Reverend Bakoula was recognised by the thirteenth Dalai Lama as reincarnation of Bakoula Arhat, one of the direct disciples of the Shakyamuni Buddha. Bakoula, the highest of Buddhist lamas, is considered as incarnate of 16 Arhats of Lord Buddha's time.

(Koushik Bakoula Rinpoche passed away in Delhi on 4th November, 2003)

Sardar Harbans Singh was the education minister of J&K state in 1961. He was highly perturbed by persistent reports of corruption in the educational institutes of the state despite the mandatory audit of high and higher secondary schools. Sardar sahib who knew me as an ex colleague, and late Khwaja GA Mukhtar, the then director education designated me to visit the whole Kashmir province including the frontier, under J&K Govt. Cabinet orders were issued to conduct departmental audit of high and higher secondary schools, including offices of Tehsil (District) educational officer and a school in Chushul, the last post where McMahon Line is drawn between India and China. This led to my second visit to Leh in 1961, though a short one of just 15 days.

I made the trip to Leh in around 40 minutes as against the earlier journey of 15 days. Flying over Great Himalayan mountain range was nevertheless as thrilling as trekking over it. After landing in Leh and looking around I felt like Rip Van Winkle returning home. Nothing could have prepared me for the change. Almost everything was different from the Leh I had known. Leh gate was nowhere to be seen, gone was the main market street of 1934, the school building and dispensary were demolished, instead there was a long one storey construction

with 20 class rooms, constructed half a km. away from the original site of the school. However, all the monasteries were intact. Most of the local gentry wore coats and pants instead of the old traditional *goncha*, and some sported ties. The Brahmin and his wife who used to look after the only Hindu temple in Leh, had left Leh for good. I was delighted to see some of my old students, now turned teachers. The joy of reunion was mutual, my old students now colleagues, arranged an evening of Ladakhi music and dance, the spectacle I used to watch in 1934 in the street. The petromaxes had yielded to electric bulbs. Social changes were evident too, the bevy of young carefree girls roaming the old main market were missing, most of the girls were studying in the schools and many of them working as teachers, nurses or having other government jobs. The attitudes too had changed. People had become more matter of fact and displayed a certain amount of no nonsense attitude.

On the outskirts of Leh, the military cantonment had spread quite far and wide. Our army had levelled uneven rocky surfaces and created play grounds instead. Tennis, volleyball and even football was played. The traditional polo game of Ladakhis was better organised now with the ancient dwarf ponies replaced by larger stronger breeds. Gigantic military trucks, jeeps, motor cycles and fuel tankers had occupied a spacious area, which had been carved out of a mountainous terrain and levelled. I found all these changes mind boggling. The metalled road over Zoji La to enable this sort of transportation was unimaginable in 1934. What tremendous feats our engineers have achieved and a visit to Khardung La pass on a road that is the highest altitude road of the world passing over 16000 feet height, confirms that.

Attempts to start a hydro electric project were unfortunately washed away by the Chinese opening the flood waters without a warning which caused the civil works of the project at Ladakh being washed away, but new projects are on the anvil.

Despite many of these changes for good, I couldn't help but notice a new discontent surfacing during my private talks to my ex students. In my old days I never had met a Ladakhi who felt he was poor. The economy of Ladakh has never had any breadth, it always has been a subsistence economy, but the Ladakhis were a happy lot. Now the exposure to outsiders had increased considerably. Ladakhis had started understanding the nuances of money based economy and the negative effects were becoming all too evident particularly amongst the young men. Exodus to Srinagar, Jammu and even far off Delhi and Bombay had claimed many young boys after completing their studies in the colleges of Srinagar and Jammu. Ladakh held no future for them.

This situation must have worsened still further when the hitherto closed and protected Ladakh was opened to international tourism in 1975. Worst of my fears were confirmed when I happened to meet some of my old contacts in Jammu; according to them a sense of inferiority had crept into the younger Ladakhi psyche.

Lately, however I was relieved to know that new educational centres have been opened to train Ladakhis how to survive and survive well by utilizing whatever nature has provided them with, like solar power to replace the dependence on fossil fuels, but that will take time. Similarly efforts are being made to improve agricultural productivity. Since an average Ladakhi family owns 2-4 acres of land, widespread use of non

electric powered pumps for lift irrigation can bring around a mini agricultural revolution.

Livestock, the traditional Ladakhi occupation, is being successfully boosted by modern animal husbandry practices to breed stronger and fatter livestock, increase the yield of milk and milk products.

The state industry department's attempt to promote an indigenous shawl industry is laudable as the initial stages of shawl making can be well undertaken in Ladakh.

Other possible developments holding key to Ladakh's economic development could include solar power for lighting, wind power for turbines and above all handicrafts like rug making and stone carving.

These environmentally sound, economic development plans could preserve the Ladakhi culture by offering opportunities and infrastructure to the Ladakhi youth so as to stop their exodus from their motherland.

The spirit of Ladakhis is indomitable and can help them tide over any adversity.

Back in 1935 ,I was transferred to Kargil, which is located on way from Zoji La pass to Leh. This was the transit point of Silk route caravans bound westwards (now Pakistan).

I found Kargil to be a cultural cauldron – multi- ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual beautiful small town.

Kargil, the cross-culture town

Kargil is the only Muslim majority district of Ladakh. Its original Tibetan name was Purig. The district has a population of 1,19,307 (as per Census 2001) the density of population only 8 persons per sq km.

In 1935. when I visited this place it was hardly one third this figure.

The language, customs, characteristics and religious practices of the early Dard settlers are quite evident in some parts of Kargil district even now; however the areas like Da Hanu have been put out of bounds for tourists by Government of India.

This step has been taken to preserve the life style of a tiny racial community who speak the same or very similar language as of Hunza land, the Pakistan occupied area of Kashmir.

Heeding to my request, the Directorate of Education, transferred me to Kargil in 1935 By now I had lost both my first wife and my sister and I had married for the second time, a girl who was hardly of sixteen years. I had no alternative, but to take along both my 67 year old mother and my young wife to the far off town of Kargil.

The journey we undertook was made on foot and on ponies. On the last lap of this tough journey, an accident, the much feared type on such journeys, occurred.

We were travelling along the river Suru banks, in a single file, through the narrow paths of the Himalyan range, the pony carrying my mother leading our party followed by my wife and then me. Suddenly the front legs of the pony carrying my mother bent down and the hinds also gave way. This part of the narrow path where the accident took place was broader by a foot or so, compared to the rest of it. Mercifully the pony remained still; any nervous movement on its part would have resulted in my mother plummeting down, deep, into the rushing waters of river Suru. The *racepah* did not lose his nerve nor did my mother. I heard her reciting *Om Shri Ganehsay Namah* an invocation to the elephant god Ganesha, in a voice expressive more of calm confidence than of panic. Swiftly other *racepahs* of our party too rushed to her rescue and she alighted from the immobilized pony. Despite this nerve racking experience, she surprisingly looked fresh in spirits having no sign of fright visible on her ever radiant face.

During this journey as we were passing the Matayan region we faced a heavy snowfall. Snowflakes and hail almost the size of small balls formed a thick sheet on my mother's Pashmina shawl. The biting cold winds from the snowstorm that my mother at the age of 67 years was facing, left me worried about the possibility of pneumonia or even paralysis striking her. We took a halt and I administered her some brandy. In Kargil the minimum temperature can fall to -40 degrees Celsius. Drass which lies in the same district has once recorded -60 degrees Celsius. Only the hardy Khampas can stay in Zaskar region of Kargil district; so ruthless is the weather in these areas.

On reaching our destination, Kargil, I was lucky to have a vacant house of the Revenue Department at my disposal. It was attached with a sizable piece of fertile land. All this was possible through the good offices of a Muslim gentleman who was the Deputy Commissioner of Kargil. My knowledge of Persian seemed to have impressed the gentleman and I was given the house for a nominal rent of Rs 3 per month.

Kargil's multi-tier township stands at an average elevation of 8700 feet. It is situated on the banks of the Suru river, lying 234 km from Leh in the east and 204 km from Srinagar in the west. Vegetation around Kargil is very luxuriant owing to abundance of water sources. It is here in Kargil that Drass and Wakchu rivers join the Suru river. Certain parts of Suru valley are famous grasslands which attract a large number of *bakarwal*, herdsmen from the adjacent areas, along with their large herds of sheep and goats. These Bakarwal tribes are thought to be a clan of the Gujjars, a distinct race widespread in Northern India. The Bakarwals generally lead a secluded and lonely life, living in the rugged terrains around Kargil. The tribes move in pairs or sometimes singly but in large numbers whenever they carry bigger herds from one meadow to the other. Their dogs called Bhutias always accompany them.

During my stay at Kargil I was fascinated to hear from my learned friends about the ancient settlers. Human habitation seems to have commenced late in this incredibly cold and rugged district perhaps as late as 500 BC. The Dards from several valleys of Gilgit were perhaps the first to settle here. They belonged to the so called Aryan race. The people of Kargil are of mixed Dard and Tibetan descent, originally followers of Tibetan Buddhism. *Mons* tribe supposed to be of Indo Aryan

origin is also believed to contribute to the genetic pool of the inhabitants.

Kargil is called the land of Agas, due to the fact that Kargil is mostly inhabited by Shia Muslims and Agas are Shia religious heads and preachers. In the views of many critics, the word Kargil has been derived from the words *gar* and *khil*. *Gar* in local language means anywhere and *khil* means a central place where people could stay. This has the support of the fact that the place is equidistant from Srinagar, Askardo, Leh and Padum, each located at a distance of around 200 km. With the passage of time Khar Kil or Gar Khil came to be known as Kargil.

I found Kargil to be a unique place where people of multi- ethnic, multi-linguist, multi- cultural origins were living together. It was normal to come across different types of people like Brogpas, Baltis, Purik, Shinas and Ladakhi. A variety of languages were spoken like Shina, Balti, Purig. The language, customs, racial characteristics and religious practices of the Dards can still be found in some areas like Da-Hanu and Chiktan-Garkun, and to some extent in Shanghy-Shaghar. However, by and large, most of the Dards- including some of their most ancient tribes got assimilated with the Tibetans.

Of all the tribes living in and around Kargil, the tribe of Brokpas and *Changpa* appeared the most culturally developed tribes to me. Brokpas converse in a sweet sounding language called Shina. Their cultural exuberance is reflected in their exquisite colourful dresses, ornaments and their festivals and the music. Their music is very akin to the fast paced *chhakri* of Kashmiris. The Shina language they speak is considered by experts as belonging to Indo European family of languages. The religious

orientation of the Brokpas is very high, some following the Muslim faith and some of them adherents of Buddhist faith. The members of this tribe have adopted agriculture and animal husbandry as their main occupations.

Another notable tribe, the Changpa tribe is mainly settled in Changthang plateau in the mountain ranges of Ladakh. I had the good fortune of spending some time with a group carrying Ladakhi salt to some villages situated between Leh and Kargil.

Agriculture is the mainstay and grain the favourite crop. In the higher reaches they rear the famed pashmina goats. For me it was a delight to use their tent made of hair of yaks and goats.

One of their favourite dishes, cooked after reaching their destination and in a festive mood consists of the stomach of goat stuffed with the goat's viscera, in the fashion of famous German eisbein.

This tribe is economically much better than most other mountainous tribes populating the Great Himalayan Range of mountains.

Occasionally one came across people of Hunzakuts, an isolationist small tribe claiming Greek descent from the remnants of Alexander the Great's army that invaded India about 327 BC.

The influence of Buddhist religion is still evident at several small places around Kargil. Mulbekh Chamba, a small hamlet, about 30 miles from Kargil on way to Leh, boasts of having a massive, nine meter-rock carving of Buddha in an exceptionally good state of maintenance called Maitreya Buddha, the future

Buddha. The sculpture seems to be the work of Kashmiri missionaries rather than of the Tibetan missionaries.

Mulbekh *gompa*, dominates the valley and the site served as an outpost to guard the caravan route.

Sani Turtot Gyat, one of the eight holiest Buddhist shrines is believed to have been built by Kanishka the emperor of India. The famous Padma Sambhav who spread the message of Buddhism to far off places from Afghanistan to Bhutan is reported to have stayed here meditating for a considerable time.

Life in Kargil on the whole was good, the place so beautiful and climate in summer so kind and above all the people were very friendly.

Since there was no piped water supply we had hired a water carrier @Rs 3/-per month, who brought us two cans of water from the river every day. My wife helped me to lay a little vegetable garden where we grew some vegetables for the kitchen.

Soon the lack of medical facilities put me under strain. First my mother got bedridden and a local barber after vigorously shaking her urine declared it to be a case of *khara*, which in Balti means sugar, diabetes. The powders prescribed by him did seem to do a lot of good to my mother. But then my wife started getting bouts of fainting and I was asked to order some bottles of Unani medicine from Srinagar.

I felt both, my mother as well as my wife, were feeling pangs of homesickness. To complicate the matters further, during the same time, my wife conceived my first son. I did not want to

take any chances and left back for Srinagar bidding a good bye to lovely Kargil, my learned Muslim friends and my dedicated students.

Kargil too has lost the prime trading position it enjoyed in days I stayed there. The road leading to Chinese Turkistan has now been closed by the Chinese and the road leading west to Askardu and there from to the silk route passing through Afghanistan, closed by Pakistan in 1947. I don't have any idea where the rich and influential, mostly Muslim traders, generally a very cultured lot, who lived in Kargil those days, might have gone now. I believe they too have abandoned this town for newer pastures.

Since 1947 Kargil has been witness to many pitched battles between India and Pakistan. In 1947 it was surrounded by the Pathan tribesmen of Pakistan but they were thwarted in their attempt when Maj Gen Thimmaya of Indian army surprised them with a few tanks and some mountain artillery.

General Musharraf the ousted dictator of Pakistan too made a futile attempt to seize the highway between Kargil and Leh by stealth. Kargil falls on the Line of Control which renders it vulnerable to any military misadventure in future.

Having written about the society in Srinagar and the mountainous regions of the state, it is interesting to learn how a political system evolved where none existed before and a fast paced change overtook the people of Kashmir.

Footnotes

1. Gilgit is a part of Dardistan, now under Pakistan occupation. The Dogra Maharajas had the origins, the ethnicity of Dards, researched, as also of the

areas they had freshly conquered or longed to conquer. The experts concluded that the original home of the Dards of Da and Drass was the Bagrot valley of Gilgit. The Dards of Drass are certainly of the Shina tribe. The people of Da speak a similar language. The Dards travelled to Kargil through Baltistan and Deosai, some of them staying on in Baltistan itself. They ruled over Purig till the Tibetan attack on Zaskar and the Tibetan rule that followed in Purig (Kargil). The Dards of Da Hanu and adjoining areas migrated to Kargil from the Yanding and Sachal areas of ancient Gilgit. Their language, Brushaski, is same as that in the fabled Hunza valley (also in Pakistan occupied Kashmir).

Hunza is considered the original Shangri La by many; because of the very high life expectancy of the region, the area in general was given the name of Kafiristan by Emperor Babar. He also has praised the quality of wine that came from this Kafiristan. The tribes that occupy Kafiristan, Gilgit, Chitral and eastwards towards Kargil and southwards down to Kashmir were collectively called Pisacha, the *raw flesh eaters*. Some of the Dards were accused of cannibalism in ancient Kashmir.

2. The Iranian influence is very evident in Kargil and Farsi is the language of the intelligentsia. Similarly the architecture of most notable buildings is a combined version of Balti and Iranian styles. One Mir Shamsuddin of Iraq is said

to have propagated Islam in Kargil and Baltistan, obviously the Shia order. Islam came to Kargil in 15th century. Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi, a scholar of Shia school of Central Asia visited Baltistan and Kargil with his missionaries to preach Islam. The chief of Baltistan embraced Islam first and it was later followed by the Chiefs of Kargil. Prior to Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi, Khwaja Noorbaksh visited Kargil and had done a lot of Islamic preaching. Buddhism remained confined to small pockets of Kargil in places like Sapi, Bodh-Kharboo areas of Garkon and Zanskar.

3. In Kargil middle school where I taught Mathematics and English was a boy in 7th class who impressed me with his winning manners, his fluent Urdu and all round achievements, if my memory serves me right his name was Yunus.

One day while in Government Secretariat, Srinagar, in 1961, a tall well-built young man suddenly approached me and paid his respects in the traditional manner. He introduced himself as the same Kargil student I had taught. He had been elected as an MLA from Kargil and later inducted as Minister of State for Industry when Khwaja Shamsuddin was sworn in as the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir State.

State and the Society

Political awakening of Kashmir

Ironical as it might sound today, the politics of Kashmir was dominated not by the majority community of Muslims, but by the tiny minority of Kashmiri Pandits in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The reason for the void in Kashmiri Muslim political leadership can be attributed to successive Afghan governors who ruled Kashmir by terror and with the sole aim of plunder. The Afghans came to power after the decay of the Mughal dynasty at the centre in Delhi. To escape the extreme Afghan tyranny, the influential and well-off Kashmiri Muslim gentry — including the Muslim intelligentsia — either fled Kashmir or receded into oblivion.

In the absence of a proper nurturing ground, and a conducive atmosphere needed for the evolution of an effective leadership, the masses of Muslims were left to the mercy of a few *mullas* who could never replicate the role of statesmen and politicians. The succeeding Sikh rule, brief as it was, also proved no better for the class of Muslims which could have provided the culture for a sound Muslim political structure and hierarchy.

The much maligned Dogra dynasty that ruled Kashmir for nearly a hundred years cannot be held guilty for the political vacuum amongst the majority community, the Muslims of Kashmir. There is nothing on record to even remotely suggest so. On the contrary, the fact is that Dogra ruler Maharaja Pratap Singh (1848-1925) initiated the moves to pull out the masses of Kashmiris from a quagmire of illiteracy and poverty left behind by Afghans and Sikhs.

He built some excellent educational institutions, built major roads connecting Srinagar city with the rest of India, and initiated work on a hydro-electric power house. Pratap Singh also employed the services of British experts to streamline his civil administration.

This process of modernisation of the state was accelerated by his successor to the throne, Maharaja Hari Singh, his nephew, in 1925.

Hari Singh had spent many years of his early life in England. This exposure to the industrialised society, propelled him to develop and modernise his state, particularly the Kashmir valley, even if it was for the main purpose of improving the tourist infrastructure with only a marginal immediate benefit to the populace at large. This enthusiasm for development on his part could also have been due to his awareness about the strategic importance of his state and a distrust of the British, whose persecution and suppressive policies had resulted in a revulsion against the British rule.

The sorry state of affairs in Kashmir's Muslim society continued till the 1930s, when Sheikh Abdullah burst on the Kashmir political scene as the "*Sher-e-Kashmir*", the undisputed leader of the Kashmiri masses. There was a challenger to Sheikh

Abdullah's supreme leadership, Mirwaiz Maulvi Yusuf Shah, but he could neither match the charisma nor the oratorical skills of the Sheikh. This factor was noted by the British, who favoured Sheikh Abdullah to organise the masses of poor and illiterate Muslims under the banner of the Muslim Conference.

It would be naïve to presume that the British did so for any humanitarian concern for the majority population; they had their own pressing reasons to do so. The British India was peeved and alarmed when Maharaja Hari Singh, speaking at the first Round Table Conference in London in 1930, said: "While Indian princes valued British connection, they had full sympathy for the aspirations of their motherland for an honourable and equal place in the comity of nations." Brave words indeed, but he had neither the military might nor the support of the masses to back his rhetoric. This bold but obviously toothless statement was interpreted by the hawks amongst the British rulers as support to the "seditious" demand for independence by the foremost representative of princely India. Alarm bells rang amongst the British India rulers and they were now baying for his blood, but quietly and subtly!

The struggling emergence of Sheikh Abdullah was a godsent opportunity for the British. According to their thinking, Sheikh was the ideal tool to be used for organising and creating a mass Muslim unrest so that the Maharaja could be pressurized, which they eventually succeeded in doing, little realizing that the same man would someday lead an all India state peoples' party against them and against their puppet regimes spread all over the subcontinent.

The other major community was of Kashmiri Pandits. They were better organised than their Muslim brethren, but their politics

did not involve the powers that ruled or the way they ruled; nor were they interested or even aware of the revolutionary waves lashing the Indian subcontinent. Their occupation was how to preserve and maintain their extreme conservative social practices and thwart any attempts to change the evil social systems prevalent amongst their society. Much later did a younger generation take things in their hands and strive to replace the old reactionary, anti-reformist leadership of their society.

The earliest activity of Kashmiri Brahmins, the Pandits, that I recall was conducted under the aegis of Dharm Sabha, led by one Pt Har Gopal Kaul. He was a lawyer having passed law locally after studying the Ranbir Daud in Urdu. This was the J&K Penal Code prepared by the learned persons at the bidding of Maharaja Ranbir Singh.

This was the sole well-organised socio-political party in the 1920s, but it concerned itself only about and around the Kashmiri Pandits, ignoring totally the Muslim masses, though the Pandit community did have some leaders of outstanding calibre who could have led a movement backed by the masses. Its excessively conservative outlook was changed by a newer generation who ultimately joined the bandwagon of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah's nationalistic and secular party in the mid '30s. This gradual evolution took time and during this time period some colourful personalities emerged.

In 1921-22, my father and my elder step brother, both executive members of the Dharam Sabha, would carry me to some of the fortnightly deliberations of this Society. I recall lot of noise being generated and skirmishes taking place in these meetings, without understanding anything that was going on.

A tall, well-built, rather bulky man, with a white Dogra type turban on his head, wearing a long loose coat and Dogra style trousers, Pt Har Gopal would control these commotions, usually about some expulsions and inclusion of members, expenses sanctioned for festivals like Herath, and Nowreh (Kashmiri Pandit New Year Day based on the little known Saptrishi calendar). Fiery speeches were made regarding the communal tension sparked by claims on a piece of land by Pandits and Muslims.

I recall one incident which my family including my mother would narrate often. It was about the unconditional release of Pt Har Gopal by the district judge. He was alleged to have uttered some foul words against Muslims and shown disrespect towards the holy Quran.

It is reported that on the final day of receiving the judgment, he pleaded not guilty. Muslims, who had lodged the case against him, had collected in large numbers in the court premises to hear the judgment. During his defence, Pt Kaul had argued that Muslims had personal grudge against him. Then he requested the court's permission to go to the toilet. Being granted the permission, he made obscene gestures from the bathroom window to the Muslim crowd amassed in the courtyard below. This infuriated the Muslim mob and resulted in furious slogan shouting against Har Gopal, threatening his life. Returning to the court, he made this event his defence plea, proving that the Muslims held prejudiced views against him and claiming his life was threatened. The judge was convinced with this argument and not only set him free but also ordered police security covers for him. This judicial victory earned him a great admiration of the Kashmiri Pandits.

Pt Har Gopal had only one daughter. He used to tie a turban on her head out of craving for a son. He gave her some education in Hindi and Urdu. She was married at an early age to a boy who died before he was 18 years. She adopted a boy, Shiv Narayan, who became famous as Pt Shiv Narayan Fotedar. In course of time he was accepted and was acknowledged the leader of the Kashmiri Pandit Yuvak Sabha. I respected Shiv Narayan for his captivating personality, his education and his candidness.

However, his extrovert personality and too straightforward a nature did cause him many detractors in the Pandit community. Serving a stint as Speaker of the J&K Legislative Assembly, he developed a major lung problem and one of his lungs had to be removed. He expired around the age of 68, and Smt Indira Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister, paid some glowing tributes to him.

The interim period between Pt Har Gopal Kaul and Shiv Narayan Fotedar, the Kashmiri Pandit leadership was filled by the Kak brothers, RC Kak and AN Kak, who represented the most conservative elements of the social scenario.

Pt Amar Nath Kak, the elder brother of Pt R C Kak (once the Prime Minister of J&K state under Maharaja Hari Singh) became president of the Dharam Sabha at Raghunath Mandir, Srinagar. He too was a lawyer and a very successful one of his time.

I had the occasion to meet him when I was about 18 years and he must have been around 50 year old or so.

Pt. RC Kak, the younger brother, after his graduation, was appointed Librarian of Government Library, placed in one hall of Srinagar Museum, popularly known as Lal Mandi. In due course

of time RC Kak was appointed the head of the Archaeology Department.

Pt Zind Kaul, better known as Masterji for his great poetic and philosophic works concerning the spiritual, was working as head clerk in this Archaeology Department. He was a very intelligent man who commanded great respect not only for his learning but also for his humility. I met him several times and have written an article about him for *Koshur Samchar*.

This great learned man had collected a store of rich information, a big collection of facts and figures about the archaeology of Kashmir. In good faith he put this collection before his superior RC Kak for the latter's comments. Instead, it is reported, RC Kak got it published under his own name. Being a true yogi, Masterji, though shocked, didn't raise any hue and cry and took only a few close friends into confidence about this disgusting episode.

Here it will be pertinent to mention that by this time the Dharam Sabha had become obsessed with the conservation and propagation of very conservative rituals of society. On top of it all, the most illogical stand it took was to discourage widow remarriage. The Sabha was obsessed with finding ways and means to stress on the ritualistic Hinduism, *Jenu*, *gayatri path*, putting of *tilak*, observing fasts of *ekadashi*, *ashtami* and above all denigrating widow remarriage.

However, its tyrannical stand against the widow remarriage issue at a time when the winds of change were blowing furiously across the Hindu society of the Indian subcontinent infuriated the newly formed young, free thinkers of the Yuvak Sabha led by Pt Prem Nath Bazaz.

The younger, more educated generation wanted reforms in the society; a firm social rejection of the much hated dowry system and the social acceptance of widow remarriage. A storm was brewing in the Kashmiri Pandit society. The deliberations of the Dharma Sabha, calculated to keep the hated practices in vogue, were making the young men disgusted, for they wanted elevation of the woman's position in society — by encouraging formal education, introducing and adopting the nationalistic dress and, above all, allowing widows to remarry without social stigma being attached to that.

The kettle boiled over one day when the liberal fraternity, along with other prominent members of the community, proceeded to Raghunath Mandir, Srinagar, where the Dharam Sabha was in session with Pt AN Kak as its chairman.

I recall him there in his jet black *achkan* coat, white Dogra turban and Dogra style trousers and his jet-black, long beard. The storming of the Dharam Sabha by the young reformers took the old Pandits, the executive members, by surprise and they were fearfully perplexed. The group of young men demanded the "obsolete" president (AN Kak) to sit down and "shut his trap". Also, they demanded that he make way for the youth and adopt new values. The president retorted with sarcasm and bad names, calling the youth group *wanirawals*, vagabonds. This infuriated the young men's group. Vedalal Vakil, one of the reformists, rushed to AN Kak and pulling at his beard called him a goat. Pandemonium followed and the old members of the Sabha fled the scene like rats deserting a sinking ship. Many records and documents of the Sabha were seized from Pt Kak.

Pt Prem Nath Bazaz was unanimously declared as president of the Yuvak Sabha. This *coup* was the end of the Dharam

Sabha and the birth of a new, vibrant Yuvak Sabha, dominated by the young, educated breed of Pandits bent on bringing some revolutionary changes in a society steeped in outdated traditions.

Pt Bazaz too has mentioned this incident in his book and my humble role in the movement.

Another reformist of Kashmiri Pandits who was instrumental in materializing the dreams of the reformist group was Kashyap Bandhu (a brief description of his life and his contribution is given in the Footnote-c).

In 1947, Pt RC Kak, who had wormed his way from the Department of Archaeology to become the Prime Minister of J&K state during Maharaja Hari Singh's rule, was publicly humiliated and dragged on a donkey through Amirakadal by the zealots of the National Conference, who accused him of being a British stooge.

Soon afterwards, both the brothers Pt R.C.Kak and Pt A.N. Kak left Kashmir for good. Pt A.N.Kak joined his sister in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, where he tried some legal practice before his death.

Kashmiri Pandits created a reputation for themselves as highly efficient administrators and reliable honest officers, whether employed with the sultans or the rabidly intolerant Afghans. Many became famous as writers and religious philosophers. Despite all these instances of individual achievements of high order, they have collectively never achieved any success worth mentioning. In fact, the inward, self-centric syndrome was so acute that this otherwise brilliant community could not hold its own in the turbulent waters of Kashmir politics. The extreme

conservative outlook of the majority of Kashmiri Pandits was the bane of the community. A visit abroad by some outstanding men in their respective fields sponsored by Maharaja Pratap Singh, became a topic of extreme tension and an undue agitation on part of some Pandits. Crossing the sea amounted to loss of the caste according to the diehard conservative Brahmins. A public demand was made for them to undergo *prayaschit*, the repentance.

I was an eye witness to a crowd collected at Porshyar Ghat and Somyar Ghat, where some eminent Pandit personalities, who were sent abroad for higher training in their respective fields, were subjected to a shameful and disgusting treatment at the hands of some semi-literate Brahmin *mandli*. A so-called resolution was passed by this rag tag *mandli* demanding forcible public repentance of the above-mentioned sons of Kashmir who had brought great honour and admiration for their community.

A group of better educated Pandits denounced the Brahmin *mandli*'s high-handedness, but they were overwhelmed by the *mandli* goons who were determined to have their own way. To stop further disgusting scenes, the accused victims, "overseas returned" luminaries, allowed themselves to be subjected to the humiliation of having their heads tonsured, being forced to eat and swallow a mixture of cow dung and cow's urine mixed with milk. Then, they were formally announced as the purified heathens and accepted back into the Brahmin fold.

Without meaning any disrespect to our ancients, it however can't be denied that the extreme myopic vision of our forefathers and their caste conceit has been greatly responsible for having turned our *Satisar*, the paradise, into the hell that it is today.

From the day they humiliated Renchen the trickster, usurper of Kashmir, by refusing to accept him as a Hindu, to the more recent past when Maharaja Ranbir Singh was prevented to authorise some Muslims to get converted back to the Hindu fold, the community has been destroying its own roots.

The Maharaja got several representations from some Muslim families to be accepted back into the Pandit community; he in all his wisdom referred the case to Arya Samaj leader Swami Dayanand Saraswati, who wholeheartedly welcomed the idea. But the Brahmins of Kashmir had different ideas. They threatened to drown themselves en masse into the river Jhelum, right in front of the maharaja's Gadhadhar temple, if any such move to convert back some Muslims into the Hindu fold was allowed.

We have generally been feeling very satisfied and proud, and have real reason to be so, over the social conditions of our womenfolk and their level of high education. But what most of us forget is that female education was generally a taboo till social reformers like Kashyap Bandhu, Prem Nath Bazaz and others took revolutionary steps to change the situation in 1930s, for which they were publicly branded as *wanirawals*, the ruffians. The dowry curse, very much mitigated now by the exodus from Kashmir, has claimed many a tragic victim in the not so distant past.

The Kashmir political scenario was changing fast. While the Kashmiri Pandits were busy sorting their social reform issues, the swell of Muslim political awakening was gathering momentum, and was about to change the political scene of Kashmir.

It won't be out of place to mention the role played by the British in this context, as written earlier. The help of the British experts in organizing the Muslim majority population of the state was done very subtly and with finesse. The British were looking for an opportunity to assert themselves and not because of any love for the poor Kashmiri muslim masses. The opportunity presented itself when some rabble rousers who were fomenting communal trouble were arrested by the state police along with Sheikh Abdullah and were lodged in the central jail. An enraged Muslim mob protesting the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah attacked and set the jail on fire. Following the serious riots at the central jail in 1931, when about 20 men lost their lives, the British pressurized the Maharaja to bring in constitutional reforms. The Maharaja was forced to appoint a commission headed by Bertrand J Glancy. In accordance with the recommendations of the Glancy Commission, the British, made the Maharaja announce a 75-member Legislative Assembly including a 37-member elected committee. In 1932, the Muslim Conference was formed with Sheikh Abdullah as its president. There were internal squabbles in the top hierarchy of this organization. Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas also projected himself as the president and Maulvi Yusuf Shah (nicknamed *bakra* the goat, by Sheikh Abdullah's followers) used his fanatical following of certain pockets of Srinagar to show off his ascendancy. But the real quantum jump in Kashmir politics came in 1938-39, when Sheikh Abdullah discarded a narrow Muslim parochial outlook and formed the National Conference, inviting all the communities to its membership. This was a crucial step towards the future political developments of Kashmir politics. There have been umpteen number of theories as to what triggered the change in Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah's outlook from a narrow Muslim communal vision to a sweeping

broad band of secular ideals. Was it the bickering for the top post in the Muslim Conference, a nonchalant attitude shown by Mr Jinnah and his Muslim League towards Sheikh, or was it the charisma of Nehru's secular and socialistic ideals, besides Sheikh's own understanding and feeling of the *zeitgeist*?

Mr Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was one of the towering personalities of the Indian political scenario. Though known for his intellect and wisdom, his handling of Kashmir and underestimation of the Kashmiri psyche makes one wonder how such a sharp mind blundered all along on the Kashmir issue. His comments about the Sheikh's National Conference, while addressing the annual session of the Muslim Conference in Srinagar, as "a band of gangsters" drove the wedge deeper and wider. Further, he snubbed Maulvi Yusuf Shah's attempts to be projected as the chief spokesman of Kashmiri Muslims by asking Maulvi Yusuf Shah to be aloof from politics as Kashmir needed a Leader not a *mullah*.

His choice was obviously Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas, a non-Kashmiri speaking Muslim whom Mr Jinnah tried to foist upon the Kashmiri Muslims. Mr Jinnah thereby made a grave mistake in assessing the Kashmiri Muslim mind, where the *ethos of Kashmiriyat* plays a very strong though silent and subtle role, and thus he paid a heavy price for it by loss of clout in the valley. In contrast, Nehru himself being of Kashmiri extraction could understand the feeling of *Kashmiriyat* and played on this sentiment very dexterously while dealing with the undisputed leader of Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah.

In 1944 the National Conference adopted the Naya Kashmir programme as its manifesto, which promised revolutionary land reforms, free education and accelerated growth of new

educational institutes; promises that materialised in toto, in the lifetime of their maker, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah.

The political situation of Kashmir took a critical turn when Sheikh Abdullah launched the Quit Kashmir movement on May 10, 1946. He was arrested shortly afterwards as the Dogra authorities, sensing his increasing might and popularity in the valley, became insecure and uncomfortable.

Sheikh and his National Conference now enjoyed the supreme position in Kashmir valley, though they had nominal followings in Ladakh and Dogra-dominated Jammu, the other two provinces of what is known as Jammu and Kashmir State.

The almost defunct Muslim Conference had following amongst the miniscule population of Dogra Muslims and other non Kashmiri speaking Muslims of the state in the hilly territories of Jammu province, but that was of insignificant magnitude in Kashmir politics.

Maulvi Yusuf Shah — the Mirwaiz — had influence confined only to a few pockets of Srinagar city.

The political scenario changed very fast thereafter in Kashmir, as it was changing fast in the rest of the Indian subcontinent. Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy, visited Kashmir in June 1947, hardly about two months before the partition of India, and tried his best to persuade Maharaja Hari Singh to take final decision whether he wished to accede to India or to a new country being proposed, Pakistan. The Maharaja managed to remain noncommittal. A disappointed Mountbatten was followed by Gandhiji in August for the same purpose, though he secured Sheikh Abdullah's release but he too failed to get

the Maharaja's consent to the crucial decision on accession to India or Pakistan.

It became quite apparent that the Maharaja strongly wished to have an independent or quasi-independent status for the State. The Maharaja's plan to have an independent Jammu and Kashmir state must obviously have seemed a practicable idea to him and his advisors and maybe history would have proved them right had it not been for the betrayal by the leaders of the then powerful Muslim League top leadership, the bosses of a newly created country- Pakistan.

The reported understanding that the Maharaja had with the top leadership of Muslim League and Mr Jinnah, of maintaining a status quo, was however broken soon afterwards in the month of September by Pakistan, when it placed an embargo on supply of essential commodities to Kashmir, which traditionally used to come from the part of Punjab now in Pakistan. Suddenly there was no fuel for transport in Kashmir, no sugar, not even salt; I have experienced the unique salt famine of Kashmir. Even this shocking development did not wake up the Maharaja to the precarious position faced by his State.

It is quite in the realm of possibility that the Muslim League leadership realised that in case of the Maharaja declaring formally to remain independent, India would grant it immediate recognition and even security support leaving no option to Pakistan but to either recognize an independent country of Jammu and Kashmir or face a full-fledged war with India.

On October 23, 1947, the riffraff militia consisting of Afridis, Mahsuds and other notorious tribes of the North West wilds of what is Pakistan now, were sent to attack Kashmir by Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

These wild desperados motivated by the lust for *zar and zan*, gold and women, had to face little opposition when they occupied Muzaffarabad, now under Pakistan. The Maharaja's small army was scattered on far off borders from Gilgit to Kohalla and was taken unawares. Again the invading bands of these marauders had to face no resistance, as even the weak but critical Kohalla bridge was inadvertently left intact for the invaders to cross the river Kishen Ganga, essential for entry into Kashmir valley.

On October 26, the city of Baramulla had to surrender to the savage force of tribal brigands, after the brave Brigadier Rajender Singh of Dogra army, along with a handful of his soldiers, fought till his last breath, to the last man and the last bullet.

Unprecedented horrors, that can seem barbaric even to the most uncivilised of the world, happened in this town of apple orchards. Even patients in the Christian missionary hospital were not spared, nuns were butchered and ravished, mothers were snatched from their wailing babies and their families for the banal desires of these brutish men sent from Pakistan. Hundreds of women committed suicide, some jumping into the wells to escape the atrocities committed by the invaders. Engrossed in rape and plunder of Baramulla city, these invaders got delayed from attacking Srinagar, the capital city, making Mr Jinnah wring his hands in despair. The savage tribals on whom Mr Jinnah had placed such high hopes for conquering Kashmir, were now drunk with the intoxication of wealth and women, which they had hoped to find only in the promised paradise after their death.

There were other factors that kept the invaders from crossing the Jhelum, including the daring shown by Mohammad Maqbool Sherwani, a lieutenant of Sheikh Abdullah.

One Major Mallick, the CO of the invaders, was made to believe an ambush by the Indian Army was laid for his brigand army across Jhelum .This caused a delay very vital to the defence of Srinagar and its airport. Sherwani was mercilessly tortured and killed by the tribal militia once his gameplan was known to them.Shaheed Sherwani lives in the hearts of Kashmiri people and his martyrdom did not go waste.

The Maharaja quietly drove away from Srinagar city on the night of October 27, to the safety of Jammu across the Banihal mountains.

The surprise invasion by Pakistani leaders left no alternative for the Maharaja, and he approached the Government of India for assistance on October 24. Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah became the Prime Minister of J&K State soon after the instrument of accession with India was signed on October 26.

This was followed by his application to Lord Mountbatten requesting for accession to the dominion of India. This wish of his was granted on October 27, and the same day the first contingent of the Indian Army reached Srinagar by air. Many heroic battles were fought by them to keep at bay the Pakistani militia, who had reached the outskirts of Srinagar airport but failed to seize it. On November 5, a trap laid for these invaders closed on them at Shaliteng, 13 miles from Srinagar city.

A combined operation by the hastily organised Indian Army and air force bombed the secret large congregation of the Pakistani tribals, assembled there planning to launch a surprise

attack on Srinagar. Overnight, the hunter became the hunted and the Pakistani tribals, thrown off guard, got confused and ran helter skelter or back to their homes in far off North West Pakistan, some even leaving behind the booty collected by them earlier in Baramulla.

It was the fortnight of fright, a fortnight exceeding in its dreadful effect the frightful Passover night of Jews. During this fortnight or so hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris were on tenterhooks, restless like defenceless doves, lacking even a single gun to guard themselves with.

But Kashmir Valley was calm, though not a single policeman was there to guard the populace. People trusted their leader, Sher-e-Kashmir Sheikh Abdullah, to save them by some miracle, just as the Jews fleeing from the Pharaoh's Egyptians expected Moses to save them.

Sheikh organised area-wise committees to keep up the morale of the people and to keep the situation under control. It was a desperate measure, but the best he could do under the circumstances.

What most critics of Sheikh Abdullah conveniently forget and what no Kashmiri especially Pandit can forget is that it was Sheikh's absolute sway on Kashmiri masses that kept life going as usual in the valley, Srinagar city included. Not a single untoward incident occurred, not a single Kashmiri Pandit, the minority community at the maximum risk, was molested or hurt.

Even marriages were solemnized in those days of extreme uncertainty. I myself attended one of the marriage functions in peace and safety. This was the glory of *Kashmiriyat* that

prevented a massacre, which could have put the worst massacres of history to shame.

Ladakh, meanwhile, was encircled by the Pakistani tribals but the heroic flights of the Indian Air Force to the unknown heights of Ladakh plateau and the surprise arrival of tanks at the Great Himalayan heights of Drass plateau, organised by Lt Gen Thimmaya, saved Ladakh.

Gilgit the territory under British lease could not be saved. It was hurriedly handed back to the Maharaja by the British and defended by a handful of Dogra army. General Ghansara Singh was the governor at that time. He was treacherously imprisoned by some of his own Pakistan influenced army elements while their comrade in arms of long standing, Col Hari Singh, was mercilessly murdered by the Dogra soldiers of Balti origins. The Pakistani flag was hoisted by an English officer of the Gilgit Residency.

Following the ceasefire and a new administration headed by Sheikh Abdullah, the State took rapid strides towards normalcy and economic recovery, which was earlier sabotaged by the Pakistani economic blockade of Kashmir. Spread of education amongst the masses became the first priority of Sheikh, the results of which can be seen today in Kashmir. The land reform act which gave the ownership of land to the tiller was one of Sheikh Abdullah's greater achievements and a revolutionary step taken by any state government in the country.

However, the alleged secret ideal of Sheikh for an independent Kashmir earned this giant of Kashmir politics a lot of opposition from Delhi as well from his own party. He was arrested on August 9, 1953. The mandarins of Delhi now made the same mistake

as was made earlier by Mr Jinnah, that is, underestimating the spirit and strength of *Kashmiriyat*.

The dream of an independent (or a quasi-independent) Kashmir is nothing new; it has been in the heart of every Kashmiri, whatever their mutual relations, sweet or sour, and independent of their political ideology. It has been there even from the days of the Mughal hegemony.

The arrest and a lifelong imprisonment of the poet Habba Khatun's husband, Sultan Yusuf Shah, by Emperor Akbar is still recalled by Kashmiris and saddens their hearts. Maharaja Hari Singh invited disaster for himself and the State for the ideal of an independent J&K state, as, ironically, did his bitter political foe, Sheikh Abdullah.

This desire to retain a regional identity, particularly in very large countries of heterogeneous demographic character, is an understandable and a recognized fact which many nations have taken note of (Footnote- c).

More recently, the assassinated Muslim leader of Kashmir, Khwaja Abdul Ghani Lone, died for the ideal of an independent Kashmir. He was a target of Pakistani agents amongst Kashmiri Muslims. Most of the opposition, separatist Hurriyat party leaders, nurse the ambitions of *Kashmiriyat* and independence except a few rabid pro-Pakistan leaders.

Poet Mahjoor sang songs expressing the ache in heart. Being a personal friend he expressed these sentiments to me in person. I will refer to him in greater detail in the Chapter titled 'Poets of Kashmir that I knew.'

With the politics of Kashmir having changed so fast after 1940, the importance of Pandit political identity became redundant and irrelevant. With the growing apprehensions and uncertainty of future looming large, the Pandits started dispersing from the valley, resulting eventually in the practical dilution of a representative Pandit organisation of the Yuvak Sabha. A bad omen and a sad development for a great society, indeed.

The socio-political revolution of Kashmir would have been impossible without the birth and growth of a mass media, a phenomenon that is still struggling to find its proper footing and the rightful recognition it needs and deserves. However, the militancy in the valley pushed the hands of its clock backwards.

Footnotes

- a. **Maharaja Pratap Singh** (1848-1925) was the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir State, and belonged to a Rajput clan of Jammu. British India tried to implicate the Dogra maharaja in a conspiracy case reportedly hatched by Tsarist Russia. With this conspiracy excuse, a ruling council was installed on the Jammu and Kashmir Royal Court, this included a British agent and included the maharaja's brother Amar Singh, the old trick of the British to divide and rule. Maharaja Pratap Singh got back full powers in 1905 after an attempt to neutralize him completely had been foiled by the exposure of highly unethical deeds of the British government of India in the *Amrit Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta, which was reported by many papers of India including the heavily circulated *Milap of Lahore* and all the regional

newspapers of India. Subsequently the issue was raised in the British House of Commons by some opposition members and the mischief against the Maharaja got exposed officially. He ruled for further twenty years till his death in 1925.

- b. Pt Jia Lal Kilam:** Kilam is a village at the southern edge of the valley. This village has produced many an intellectual. One of them being Pt Jia Lal Kilam, the first LLB of Kashmir. During Ramchander(RC) Kak's reign as prime minister of J&K state, he tried to placate the Dogras of Jammu and the Muslims of Kashmir at the cost of Kashmiri Pandits. This not very subtle move on the part of RC Kak carried little conviction both to the Dogras as also to the Muslims. But it goaded the Kashmiri Pandits to launch an agitation named Roti Movement, actively led by JL Kilam. He was arrested, as were many of us, though strangely enough most were reported absconding having gone underground. This agitation of Pandits was successful in that many of its demands had to be agreed to, by an unwilling Prime Minister Kak. One of the most daring moves of Kilam came when he presided over the public meeting held in honour of Mr Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the man responsible for the creation of Pakistan, in Pratap Park, Srinagar. Sheikh Abdullah wanted to boycott this meeting and only a few followers of Maulvi Yusuf Shah attended the meeting. Pt Jia Lal Kilam presided the meeting solely because he held Mr Jinnah in high esteem, being a brilliant legal luminary of India. After Sheikh Abdullah

came to power Jia Lal Kilam was made Justice of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court. He died as the widely respected Justice Kilam.

- c. State within a State:** Even a small and homogenous country like Germany has a special status for the State of Bayern (Bavaria), which has its own constitution and is even armed with a right to secede from the Federal Republic of Germany. Their national party CSU can fight elections only in the State of Bayern. The reasons for this demand of the Bavarians in Germany are very similar to those of Kashmiris: A strong sense of having a different culture, a different mini nation, a different language and even a different topography. The case of Bayern proves there can be a semi-autonomous, small state within a greater State having some laws peculiar and restricted to it alone. Jointly both can thrive and face the rest of the world as one nation.

Media in Kashmir

In the early days, Kashmiris had no means of getting news; not even a periodical! The only formal exchange of information would happen in the court of Maharaja Pratap Singh, who would give an audience to a select few on Sundays. I used to often hear my father, who was one of the select few attending this court, speaking to his brothers, cousins and friends about matters discussed at the court. The topics discussed would range from issues of *mamla* — the land revenue dues from landowners, revenue litigations, plague in district of Pampore, and epidemic of cholera.

In absence of a formal news delivery system, it is not difficult to understand why Kashmiris by and large became obsessed with rumours. Rumour-mongering took such severe proportions that more than a 100 years back Walter Lawrence wrote: "The Zaina Kadal, 4th bridge, of the city used to be the place where false rumours were hatched, but now the news makers have moved to the 1st bridge, Amira Kadal." (In fact, the 4th bridge, Zaina Kadal, did not exist and the term was used in jest to imply that the news or information was not authentic and merely fabricated).

Once in a while in 1921, I would hear of an Urdu weekly published in Lahore by one Pt Gopi Nath Gurtu. This weekly

was named *Bahari Kashmir* and it was received by a few Pandits (97% Pandits were literate, the rest 3% mainly residing in villages were illiterate- they were either land tillers or domestic help of well to do families). This Urdu weekly, *Bahari Kashmir*, was very narrow in its scope and gave little importance to the burning issues which the nation was facing. There was just a passing reference to Gandhiji's *khadi* movement, a movement that eventually shook the British empire. Even Gandhiji's arrest found a mere mention. All the news of political importance paled into insignificance in view of the local Kashmiri Pandit politics that too mainly confined to the Srinagar city.

After a couple of years, another Urdu weekly was published by the same Lahore-based gentleman. This was called *Akhbari Aam*. It did get some reasonable response from Kashmiri subscribers. The main issues tackled were pertaining to Kashmiri Pandit social reforms.

Another Urdu daily of Lahore, *Milap*, also gradually crept into Kashmir in 1927; thanks to the untiring efforts of one Pt Tarachand of Gheru village, Pulwama district. He was an impressive writer of Urdu and got into close contact with the editor of *Milap*.

The relationship culminated in Tarachand's becoming sub-editor of *Milap* at Lahore. He changed his name to Kashyap Bandhu, Kashyap after the founder *rishi* of Kashmir and Bandhu meaning a servant.

It was in 1926 that I saw for myself the first English daily, *Tribune*, contributed to by my late uncle Pt Mahadeo Joo Parimoo.

A general store at Amira Kadal got the distributorship of *Tribune, Lahore*, and the subscription price was an anna per issue. Mr Batra, the owner of the store, had a few customers for this paper. There was no home delivery system and the paper reached Srinagar one day after its issue in Lahore. This daily rarely had any news about the J&K state, as the people of the state did not seem much concerned about the freedom movement against the British.

It was in 1925 (the year that Maharaja Pratap Singh died) that a veteran journalist, Shri Mulak Raj Saraf, started a weekly, *Ranbir*, published from Jammu. He can rightly be called the pioneer of journalism in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Shri Mulk Raj Saraf got his due recognition in 1968, when he got his well-earned award at the hands of the then Governor of J & K State, Shri Bhagwan Sahay.

Ranbir courageously started criticizing the maharaja's government for its backwardness and lack of a clear, strong policy. One of the major achievements was the paper's revelation regarding a conspiracy by the British to dethrone Maharaja Pratap Singh. The paper later acknowledged *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, the forceful English daily of Calcutta, as the source for this news.

I had the good luck to become a good friend of Shri Saraf much later in the 1960s, when I was living in his neighbourhood at Jammu. Shri Saraf also published a book commemorating *Ranbir* in addition to some bold, fearless editorials against the British government to strengthen the Dogra rulers and for better governance of the State.

The daily *Ranbir* did not enjoy any Kashmiri readership, perhaps because of the undercurrents of mutual dislike between the Dogras and Kashmiris, at that time.

In 1979, Shri Mulak Raj Saraf had undertaken a visit to Pakistan with the hope that it might strengthen the more peaceful and rationalistic minds there.

Shri Saraf wrote his *Fifty Years as a Journalist* and sent me the book for my views and reviews. I conveyed my sincere impressions, which he was gracious enough to have published in the book along with those of Dr Karan Singh, Dr Zakir Hussain, Chief Justice Murtaza Fazal Ali and Justice JK Madholkar, Chairman, Press Council of India. In his book I have said what I still hold true for him:

"A true son of the soil and an honest journalist who has fought many a battle to uphold the truth and has won the war in the long run."

The first major boost to Kashmiri journalism came with the launch of *Martand*, as a result of the untiring efforts of Pt Kashyap Bandhu. This paper caught the fancy of Kashmiri Pandits and soon became a morning ritual of the KP families.

Martand's stated aim was to organize Kashmiri Pandits, bring necessary reforms into the society besides bringing new political awakening. It started a movement of collecting rice to help the KP widows. This was called *Mochha Phallu*, a fistful of rice.

Martand's rapidly increasing circulation was not viewed kindly first by the Dogra rulers and later by Sheikh Abdullah. *Martand* had a friendly attitude towards Bakshi government

after Sheikh Abdullah, but again came under clouds during the Sadiq regime. Bandhuji prompted me to write some articles for this paper.

Sandesh was another creation of Bandhuji, which he later sold off. Pt Shyam Lal Saraf, the Education Minister during Sheikh Abdullah's ministry, patronized *Sandesh*. But *Sandesh* soon fell victim to cheap blackmail of government officials and got into disrepute and subsequent demise.

Meanwhile, a Muslim organization came into existence and started a daily paper, *Sadaqat*. This was the first serious effort at journalism by Kashmiri Muslims. The main aim of this publication seemed to spread communal virus in the valley, clearly indicating a political awakening of the Muslims of Kashmir.

It was Pt Prem Nath Bazaz who turning to journalism counteracted against the communalism spread by *Sadaqat*, through his weekly *Vitasta*, floated in 1945 with Pt Dina Nath Hanjura as its editor.

Pt PN Bazaz, a very self determined and vigorous personality dedicated to the cause of nationalism and the cause of the downtrodden, also started a Urdu daily, *Hamdard*. In the beginning a very intimate friend of Sheikh Abdullah, he was to a great extent responsible for influencing the latter from communalism to nationalism. As a consequence, the Muslim Conference was converted into the National Conference. However, soon he and Sheikh turned adversaries of each other. The reason being Pt Bazaz's declared obsession with the downtrodden of the majority Muslim community who, he inferred, wanted accession to Pakistan if an independent state was unachievable. Unwittingly, he helped Pt Ram Chand

Kak, the PM of Jammu and Kashmir state, who was not keen on accession to India and wished to retain an independent position under a standstill agreement sans the maharaja to preserve *Kashmiriyat*. In this thinking, Bazaz had the explicit and implicit support of some prominent Kashmiri Pandits like Dr ON Thussu, Shri Kanya Lal Kaul, advocate, Dr KN Tickoo and one Mr Qurreshi of Maisuma who later joined the Congress and was rewarded by being made Railway Minister in the Union cabinet. Pt Bazaz's assessment of Indian politics was the same as of MN Roy, an internationally renowned political thinker.

Besides *Sadaqat* of Muslim Conference, one more paper was floated propagating communal ideology, named *Haqiqat*.

All these were wound up under pressure of Sheikh Abdullah when he became the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir state and president of the National Conference in November 1947. The National Conference started a daily to counter *Martand*, called *Khidmat*. Pt Nandlal Wattal, a very good Urdu writer, was entrusted with the editorship of this paper and the paper enjoyed full patronage of the government.

The arrest and dismissal of Sheikh in 1953 saw the emergence of the first English daily, *Kashmir Times*. Shri JN Zutshi was the private secretary to Sheikh Abdullah. Mr Zutshi started this paper after his boss's arrest. The paper was managed by Mr JN Gauhar, a retired lecturer of SP College, Srinagar .

In and after 1958 there was a mushroom-like growth of Urdu dailies and weeklies, prominent amongst these is *Aftaab*.

Martand was banned by Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq when he was the chief minister of J&K state in 1964, and this was the death knell of free, frank journalism in Kashmir.

However, Kashmiri journalism did have a brief period of glory with its cultivated journalistic dignity. A few Kashmiri journalists did earn nationwide recognition and one of them, Shri J N Parimoo, achieved even an international standing as the resident correspondent of The Times of India Group in Washington. He earned the distinction of being the first Indian journalist ever granted an exclusive interview with the President of the USA Ronald Reagan. It was on October 21, 1985, that he cornered President Reagan on the issue of certification to Congress on Pakistan, implying that Pakistan did not have the bomb. The US President took shelter behind an excuse of non availability of proof that Pakistan had a bomb. (Refer www.google.com and search JN Parimoo)

Journalism in Kashmir showed increased tendencies of rot and decay after Sheikh Abdullah's demise. The increasing communalization of Kashmiri society and politics touched the bottom in the late 1980s when the press not only published rumours as facts but elevated the status of terrorists to that of *mujahideen* and martyrs. "The press in Kashmir had become a mouthpiece of naked Pakistani terrorism," bemoaned the much maligned then Governor of J&K state, Shri Jag Mohan.

Broadcasting was introduced in Kashmir in the year 1948 when Radio Kashmir was started by the Kashmir government with the objective of negating the effects of a false and malicious propaganda unleashed by Pakistan occupied Kashmir's Radio 'Azad Kashmir'. However, a good fallout was the revival of the popular Kashmiri music and plays. In fact, credit must be given to Radio Kashmir for popularizing and reviving Kashmiri music, which was being swallowed by the popular Bombay movie music.

The outstanding authors and playwrights who specialized in the comic genre contributed a great deal to the fast growing popularity of Radio Kashmir. I can't help but remember the great names of Som Nath Sadhu and Pushkar Nath Bhan, who created evergreen master pieces like *Zoon Daba* and *Khatiji Machchama*. Similarly it was the late Tibet Bakal who not only popularized the Sufiana music but also helped in creating an all India awareness of the unique Kashmiri musical instrument called Santoor. These great writers and artists would have died anonymous deaths but for Radio Kashmir.

The problem, however, was the availability of radio sets. India didn't produce any radios at that time; all radios were imported or assembled with imported parts. This rendered the whole exercise of having a radio station useful only to a few who could afford to buy a set at an exorbitant price. The state government did solve the problem partially though, by installing sets in each *mohalla* (a small cluster of houses) armed with loud speakers, so a good number of people could gossip and spend time around the loud speaker listening to music and the news. Of course, not everyone could be benefited this way, least of all the women who would not be seen on a roadside standing alone to listen to a radio. Some clever guy came out with a home-grown solution called a "crystal radio" at one-tenth the price of a radio set. But only one person at a time, living in a radius of 15-20 km of the broadcasting station, could listen to the broadcasts using a one piece headphone.

Television made its entry in the 1980s, however till date it has not been so versatile as radio in popularizing the Kashmiri language. It is obliged to dedicate its time to several languages which constitute the linguistic minorities of the state like Dogri, Pahari, Balti and Ladakhi.

The media and media men did and are playing their parts as best as they can under the very adverse conditions on account of militancy, they are facing now, but the creators and builders of a new path are the brilliant minds of some Kashmiri poets who have infused a heightened sense of the social ethos called *Kashmiriyat*.

Political personalities and a tribute to the forgotten, unsung heroes

My Interactions with Kashmiri Personalities

Life put me in circumstances where it brought me in touch, sometimes in close contact, with several personalities of Kashmir who changed the face of Kashmiri society in one way or the other. I may not be able to mention all the worthies of Kashmir who would deserve special mention and whose contribution may have done a lot to effect changes in Kashmir's social, economic and political fabric.

I will start with the most phenomenal Kashmiri who not only changed history but, more importantly, brought about a successful social revolution in his society, in his own lifetime, a dream he had expressed in his Naya Kashmir programme.

Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, Sher-e-Kashmir

It was in 1929; Mufti Jalaluddin was my friend and classmate in SP College, Srinagar. Not only were we in the same class but had chosen the same subjects and we shared the same bench in the first row.

One day he invited me to his place near Patther Masjid just opposite Maharaj Ganj, Zaina Kadal. As we were walking together towards his home, I marked an unusually tall young man wearing a red *fez* cap, coming towards us from the opposite direction. On coming close, Jalaluddin greeted this man and the two exchanged warm *salaams*. Mufti Jalaluddin introduced me to the young, tall man, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, an MSc from Aligarh University and working as a science teacher in Govt High School. I too shook hands with him. While Sheikh was speaking to us, we felt like dwarfs in the presence of a giant. His large big eyes in a long face with prominent cheeks pierced a man like two sharp lances. He spoke for a few minutes in a deep bass and we parted, walking towards Mufti's home in awestruck silence.

Answering my queries regarding the unusual person we had just met, my friend Jalaluddin told me that soon after his return from Aligarh, Sheikh had tried for a post befitting his qualifications, being the first Muslim of Kashmir who had done MSc. But all his efforts came to a naught. The frustrated Sheikh accepted the post of a science teacher on a salary of Rs 45 per month plus some measly allowances in the Dilawar Khan Government High School, later known as Government High School. Incidentally, this was the school where I taught mathematics and english to 9th and 10th standards in 1940.

As a teacher Sheikh was a misfit, his towering personality was irksome to his students who spared no occasion to harass him, as is the wont of high school boys. Perhaps it was a blessing in disguise for the Sheikh.

This was the time when the British were looking for an opportunity to bring down the Dogra regime and punish

Maharaja Hari Singh. The Maharaja, during the Round Table Conference (in 1930) at London had made a patriotic though politically inappropriate statement that he would be the first prince to feel happy if the British left the coast of India. This and other similar statements of his had infuriated the hawks in the British establishment, who termed these statements as seditious and became suspicious of the Maharaja.

Around same time, Sheikh Abdullah was looking for greener pastures and he came across the *khansama* of Mr Wakefield, minister in waiting of Maharaja Hari Singh, and an agent of the British India. The said *khansama* arranged Sheikh's meeting with Mr Wakefield, who had been commissioned by the British government to pressurize the Maharaja and even to topple him.

Mr Wakefield, who was waiting for a chance to do his official bidding as also to settle some personal scores against the Maharaja, got a golden opportunity when he chanced to meet a highly disillusioned, highly motivated and well educated young man, Sheikh Abdullah. Sheikh reportedly was encouraged to organize and stage a mass rising against the Dogra regime, and a bright vista was opened for him. Soon afterwards, Sheikh resigned the teacher's job that he hated anyway.

One of the earliest and also rarest communal conflicts in Kashmir happened in 1930 when a sudden and strong tension gripped the Kashmir valley. It was Sheikh Abdullah's village, Souvra near Vichar Nag, a suburb of Srinagar, from where an excited mob of Muslims marched towards Vichar Nag to loot the Pandits there. Another mob proceeded towards Maharaj Ganj for the same purpose of looting Hindu businessmen. Stories circulated that several Pandits were killed and many plunged into the river Jhelum from the 4th and 5th bridges. There were

no radios or newspapers to report, confirm or even deny the incidents.

A few days later, another *khansama* named Kadeer, working with a foreign tourist who was residing at that time in a houseboat near Dalgate, addressed a Muslim mob on a Friday near Dalgate.

His highly inflammatory speech aroused the mob, which burst into arson and violence.

The epicentre of all these unfortunate and unprecedented disturbances was the Sheikh's little known village Souvra (now a posh residential suburb of Srinagar) and overnight a name, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, gained high currency in the entire valley as the author of these disturbances and thereby a star was born on the political horizon of Kashmir.

The Dogra army of the Maharaja suppressed the uprising and a flag march was staged through Srinagar city. It relieved the tension and fear amongst the minority community and instilled fear in the hearts of the rioting elements.

Around this time, that is, in 1931, I used to go to Darbag, a beautiful village about 15-20 km from Srinagar, daily on a cycle to teach there. The atmosphere was so tense, with soldiers on horsebacks patrolling the streets, that I made a point to make my religious identity prominent by putting a *tilak* on my forehead everyday.

In the month of March, the *khansama* Kadeer was being tried within the premises of Central Jail, Hari Parbat. Kadeer was sentenced to imprisonment and the same evening Sheikh Abdullah was imprisoned too. In retaliation, the jail premises

were put to torch by the mobs, several people — reportedly twenty — lost their lives. The opportunity that British India was looking for was there now, for them to pressurize the Maharaja and get even with him over his "seditious" speech in London. A fact-finding commission was established by a reluctant Maharaja and the Glancy commission was formed and given a powerful mandate.

I have described the political turmoil of that time elsewhere in this book; my objective here is to describe the Sheikh as I saw him and what I learnt about him.

Sheikh Abdullah created the Muslim Conference, which emerged as a well organised and well funded political body. So from a frustrated teacher, nicknamed by his mischievous students *gadakala* (a long fish head), Sheikh finally emerged as the beloved mass leader and came to be known as "Sher-e-Kashmir", the lion of Kashmir.

It is beyond my purview to describe all about him. He has already got his autobiography published, which was greatly facilitated by one Mr Yusuf Teng, a bright student of my friend Shri DN Hanjura .

Yusuf Teng and the late Shameem, a literary giant on his own, had once invited me to write an article on my friend and colleague Abdul Ahd Dar Azad, a revolutionary poet of Kashmir. I had found in Yusuf Teng a very good Urdu writer and recognized his talent. So it did not surprise me when Sheikh appointed him to write and otherwise guide him to write his autobiography, named *Aatish e Chinar*.

I have had three long meetings with Sheikh Sahib.

The first time, when I was appointed as convener of the Kashmiri Script Formation Committee in 1949.

Sharda town, now under Pakistan occupation, was the birthplace of Sharda script, which was taught to me by my late father in my boyhood to enable me to read his big volume of the Bhagwad Gita. It is wrong to say that Kashmiri has no script of its own. The real script of Kashmiri is Sharda. Some sounds like **tsch** as in **tschar**, cannot be written in Devnagri, Arabic or in Roman letters. The sound in **guer**, is yet another example.

Sheikh Abdullah appointed me as convener to contrive a script suitable for Kashmiri. Other distinguished members of the committee included Pt Srikanth Toshkhani, Kh Shamasudin Panadani (historian), Professor Kaul, retired principal, SP College, and Pt Jia Lal Nazir.

After Kashmiri got the recognition of an Indian language in the Indian Constitution, it became necessary to improvise a script of its own. Except Sharda which contains 23 vowels of pure Kashmiri language, there is no other script that can convey all these vowel sounds and combinations thereof.

One day I was summoned by Sheikh Sahib to meet him at his residence near Nedou's hotel. I apprised him of the viewpoint of other members who believed strongly that nothing other than Sharda could be the natural script of Kashmiri language. Sheikh unhesitatingly and spontaneously replied "Do you think the Muslim masses will ever adopt it?" I was convinced by the sincere viewpoint of the practical politician that Sheikh was. The two hours I spent with him were awe-inspiring, yet he had made me feel completely at home.

The second occasion to be with Sheikh Sahib was one of the happiest moments of my life.

Tortured by communists, several Muslim Turkistani Kazakhs had fled their homes along with their families from what was then known as Chinese Turkistan. These people are now known as Uighurs of Xinjiang, the western province of China adjoining Tibet. Marching long distances on yaks, ponies and on foot, these hardy characters, braving a highly treacherous terrain over glaciers and frozen snows, had come through Ladakh along the Indus gorge, down to Sheikh's Srinagar. Here they sought asylum and humane treatment. There were a couple of hundreds of them: men, women and children, all handsome, rosy cheeked, smiling faces. All of them were accommodated in Sarai Safa Kadal though with difficulty as even the massive big Sarai was not big enough to accommodate all of them. They put their *naan* making *tandoors* and utensils in the open ground of the Sarai to bake their very tasty special bread on their specially designed ovens.

Sheikh Sahib was extremely kind to them and wanted them to get settled and mix with the local population. A settlement and rehabilitation home for them was established through the Directorate of Education, in Kak Serai near Chhattabal, a suburb of Srinagar city. The Director, the late Mr Kazmi, and the Deputy Director, Kh Nurudin, proposed my name to be the organiser-in-charge of this home and empowered me with everything that I may need to achieve the objectives laid. This included a generous budget which was at my discretion and disposal. I was responsible to Sheikh Sahib and accountable to him for expenditure of this home. I started with the help of various teachers selected from various schools of the valley. The whole lot of the Turko/Kazakh asylum seekers was split

into three groups for day to day activities: male adults, female adults and children. Adults were engaged in vocations of their choice like tailoring, black smithy, carpentry, textile-weaving and bread-making in their traditional style and using their own indigenous ovens, the *tandoors*. The bread they made was really very appetizing and tempting to look at and a treat to the palate, whether had with a sizzling hot kebab or with a little butter and a cup of *kahwa* tea.

Children from the primary schools in the vicinity were invited over to mix with the Kazakh kids so the refugee kids could pick up Urdu fast and perfectly.

Two months after setting of this camp, Sheikh Sahib, accompanied by the Director Mr Kazmi and Deputy Director Kh Nurudin, visited the centre. He talked to me about all the aspects of rehabilitation, talking to me in Kashmiri, a departure from his usual practice of speaking in Urdu while on official tours. He was highly impressed and expressed to me his great appreciation and immense joy for the efforts I had put in. Here, I beg to be allowed a little digression. While Sheikh Sahib was engaged in talking to me for a long time, Mr Kazmi and Mr Nurudin tried to barge into the conversation. But the Sheikh was quick to browbeat them for their interruption and, to my discomfiture, he acknowledged my contribution towards the success of the project. However, that was Sheikh, the no-nonsense administrator and the straight shooter. As a parting shot, he, loudly, for the benefit of all, asked me to spend as much as was needed to make the home a brilliant success.

The third time I chanced to meet Sheikh Sahib was when I went to invite him to a teachers' general meeting organised in the premises of the Government High School. Sheikh Sahib

besides being the Prime Minister of the J&K state was also the Education Minister.

I, as the President of the Teachers' Association, and some members of the teaching community felt the need of holding a public meeting to express strong condemnation against the dictatorial attitude of an upstart of the education department, one Agha Ashraf Ali, recently appointed as Deputy Director, Education. So I took a small representative delegation to meet the Sheikh and invite him to preside over the function. He talked to me for a long while in Kashmiri, but expressed his inability to come and preside over the function. I had a strong feeling that he had already guessed the purpose of this meeting. As Education Minister, Sheikh Sahib would have been open to the charge of encouraging indiscipline had he presided over the function. Anyway, shortly afterwards, Agha Ashraf was cut down to size by being transferred as an English lecturer to Sopore college, and I was transferred back to my post at Srinagar.

It was not difficult to understand the politics of Sheikh Abdullah if we accept the basic fact that Sheikh was an upright personality, whose goals in life were as open and as noble as those of Jawaharlal Nehru. True, he was hassled into a relation with India by force of circumstances and acute lack of time. There was no other alternative for him given the extreme limitation of time and the life-threatening danger to masses of Kashmiris, victims of a barbarous aggression launched by Pakistan in October 1947. Calling him a political hypocrite would be as erroneous as believing that an average Kashmiri would like to be totally dependent on the whims and mercies of powers that be in Delhi or in Islamabad.

Sheikh probably nurtured the dream of Kashmir materially independent to manage its internal affairs, as the most practical elements of the so called moderates in Kashmir demand, a manifestation and assertion of *Kashmiriyat* that many myopic leaders of India and Pakistan are quick to ridicule.

How strong and how innate is this sentiment irrespective of caste, creed, religion or political outlook, is lost to the semi-educated politicians and the stiff-necked bureaucrats of Delhi. They forget that even some of Sheikh's most bitter opponents shared the same dream. Didn't Maharaja Hari Singh lose his kingdom trying to have an independent Kashmir against all odds? There is no doubt that he and Sheikh were sworn enemies, but isn't it curious they shared the same ideal when it came to *Kashmiriyat*?

So did Pt RC Kak, who lost his prime ministership for egging on the Maharaja towards a separate J&K state. The old friend and comrade of Sheikh, Pt PN Bazaz, who influenced the political thought process of Sheikh's conversion from a Muslim separatist to a nationalist, much earlier than Pt Nehru focused his charisma on Sheikh, not only lost a friend in Sheikh but also earned the wrath of his own community, forcing him to a self imposed exile in Delhi, for his separate Kashmir ideal, which, however, was too far from ground realities.

As Lord Meghnad Desai has written, "It is quite clear that politics in India is devoid not only of ideology but also principles... Gone are the days when major political parties all around the world had some intellectuals, the party ideologues who worked as think tanks of the party." The case of Sheikh's reputation as a nationalist and a patriot mainly suffered because of lack of farsightedness in the Congress party after Nehru; and the born

lack of this intellectualism in the Jan Sangh or its offshoot, the BJP.

I candidly remember the day when Pt Jawaharlal Nehru stood on the dais at Lal Chowk ,Srinagar, in the company of Sheikh Abdullah and other National Conference leaders to address a mass of Kashmiris. Speaking in Urdu, he said, "*Hum nay ceasefire declare kiya, yani goliyon ka idhar udhar chalana bandh.... Jammu Kashmir ka ek apna sadre-riyasat hoga, ek kanoonsaaz assembly hogi ,aur ek jhanda hoga.*"

(We have declared ceasefire against the Pakistani raiders... Jammu and Kashmir will have a president of the state, a legislative assembly, and a flag of its own).

Did the Prime Minister of India go back on a promise publicly made and have the Sheikh arrested in August 1953 so as to pave the way for the amendment of the Delhi accord? In 1964, the Prime Minister of Kashmir was relegated to a Chief minister and the post of Sadre Riyasat abolished, to be replaced by a governor nominated from Delhi. These changes seemingly were of little consequence but left an indelible scar on the Kashmiri mind. The thought haunting them was: Could Delhi be trusted?

The subsequent events after the resignation of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, when the Chief Ministers of J&K state were brought in and unceremoniously shunted out of power corridors, only strengthened this distrust of Delhi in the minds of Kashmiri masses, their leaders having become irrelevant, a power vacuum was created and this was exploited to full by Gen Zia in Pakistan who drew his game plan to keep a proxy war going in Kashmir and thereby bleed India of its resources continuously.

Gradually increasing distrust ultimately resulted in increasing disillusionment with Delhi and unfortunately increasing sympathy and acceptance for the old enemies, the Pathan and Punjabi *mujahideen* from across the border, the same untamed frontier men from the NWFP of Pakistan whose forbearers had ravished parts of Kashmir earlier in 1947.

Even much earlier a section of Indian politicians like the late Shyama Prasad Mukherjee lost no time in revealing what the varying colours of Indian politics could be. Sardar Patel also didn't show the sensitivity to deal with a self-respecting Kashmiri leader like Sheikh Sahib. I have heard a firsthand account of how Sheikh Sahib was called and then received in Delhi first by Pt Nehru, who directed him to Sardar Patel. During that unfortunate visit the cold shoulder given to Sheikh and extreme lack of civility shown towards him could have set at fire any self-respecting politician having a grass root following. A politician having a mass following like Sheikh Abdullah is distinct from the drawing room-gentleman-politician who is handpicked by his godfather politician and disposed off when fancied.

The die was cast that day, and the flame that eventually engulfed the nation in a raging fire was lit to demand certain degree of guaranteed independence for Kashmir.

The relations with Delhi continued to steadily deteriorate and on August 8, 1953, Sheikh Sahib was dismissed as the prime minister, on the ground that he had lost the confidence of his cabinet(not of the house). To deny him an opportunity to prove his majority in the House, he was immediately arrested for conspiring against the State. However, on April 8, 1964, the government dropped all charges against him and he returned

to his people, a triumphant hero to an unprecedented welcome by Kashmiris.

However, during the long period, several ministries were tried and abolished in the turbulent state of Jammu and Kashmir by Delhi, each ministry proving more unpopular than the one preceding it. As the great Indian diplomat Shri BK Nehru succinctly put it,

"From 1953 to 1975 chief ministers of Jammu and Kashmir state had been nominees of Delhi."

In 1975 the long drawn Indira-Sheikh parleys came to a satisfactory conclusion. Mir Qasim, who was the Chief Minister, resigned voluntarily and Sheikh was again brought to the helm of affairs, though as a Chief Minister and not as Prime Minister.

Sheikh on trial for treason

According to Shri Jag Mohan, both "Nehru and Sadiq (*the then Chief Minister of J&K state*) together decided to withdraw the treason case against the Sheikh, as they were feeling uneasy about it."

Shri Jag Mohan is a highly educated, knowledgeable and experienced administrator, who served two stints as governor of the state. However, I feel puzzled how he forgets to mention the reasons for the so called uneasiness and for the wisdom of withdrawal of the charges. Now, since it is such an old matter and all the leading actors of this drama including the Sessions Judge who had heard the case, my friend Shri MK Tickoo, are no more with us, I feel I should speak out what I know.

One day after reading in a leading national daily a highly inimical article indirectly casting doubts on MK Tickoo's way

of conducting the case against Sheikh Abdullah, I brought the said article to his notice. Tickoo was a gentle character, honest to the core, who kept his cool under the most irritating of circumstances, and normally would just gently smile the enquiry off. But to my surprise his reaction this time was quick and surprising as if he was anticipating this sort of question or perhaps he had already been asked the same question earlier too. He was feeling very sensitive about the uncharitable remarks about him in the national press. He immediately took from his wallet some newspaper cuttings of the British and other European papers, pushing them in my hand he said, "Dina, I value these comments more than what a biased press with motivated interests writes about my handling of the case." There were several cuttings from the European press eulogizing the values of justice being held high in Indian courts as exemplified by the court proceedings held in Jammu, with regard to Sheikh's trial.

In short there were many a hint available to the state and public at large, to understand which way the wind was blowing. This caused the uneasiness to the state, and it wanted to prevent the public embarrassment that an adverse judgment could have brought to the nation. Clearly it was not withdrawn because of any soft corner or any late sympathy wave in favour of Sheikh. I have not tried to delve on Sheikh's politics but tried to convey an honest picture of the background conditions to his politics, as known to me.



Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah

Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, Khalid-e-Kashmir

I must mention here that my relationship with Bakshi Sahib has been very close. I will try my best to be the impartial chronicler of events and will try my best not to allow my emotions affect my ability to express facts I consider true and vital.

I remember my college days when *khadi* had become a highly emotive issue to young men like me all over the country. I happened to meet Bakshi Sahib for the first time when a group of us, college boys, barged into a big shop at Hari Singh High Street, Srinagar. The shop was Khadi Bhandar (*Khadi*, the hand-spun hand woven-cloth propagated by Mahatma Gandhi). Although Bakshi Sahib was an employee there, from his long talk to us, we found him a zealot of the *khadi* movement and a devout follower of Gandhi. He was in an expansive mood and narrated his life story. He had given up his studies after passing

7th standard from a missionary school managed by Mr Biscoe at 3rd bridge, Fateh Kadal. Then he joined the Gandhi movement and made the success of *khadi* the goal of his life.

Many years later I met him again but then he was the Deputy Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir and not an employee of Khadi Bandar and I was the Headmaster of Babapora Middle School, a model school of the state, and not a college student any more. Many educationists and eminent personalities both Indian and from abroad used to pay a visit to this school. They included personalities like Dr Radhakrishnan, Dr KM Panicker and Smt Rameshwari Nehru.

Bakshi Sahib felt the need of a warden cum tutor for his only daughter who was 17 years old and had yet to clear her 10th, matric, as we used to say. My superiors urged me to take up this unusual assignment in addition to the job I had. I was reluctant but accepted the assignment under pressure.

Barely a month had passed after taking this appointment that the whole Bakshi household had turned very friendly to me. They were so sociable and respectful to me that I felt emotionally as one of them and they truly accepted me as one of the family whether it was Begum Bakshi, or her mother-in-law Hajra Begum, or the Bakshi brothers Majid and Abdul Rehman.

The Bakshis, both husband and wife, were never hesitant to talk about their humble origins; they never lost their humility. Once Begum Bakshi said to my wife, "Oh I have mended my clothes all my life, I used to sew and mend my *pheran* at least twice a day for that was the only one I could afford."

Shama was the name of my ward. She preferred listening to my explanations of Ghalib's poetry to anything else. Incidentally, the late Pt DP Dhar was there almost daily and would come to listen to my commentaries on Ghalib's poetry with rapt and genuine interest. Later he played a pivotal role in signing of the famous Shimla Agreement between India and Pakistan following the Bangladesh war.

The winter of 1952 saw the Praja Parishad Party's movement launched by the Dogras of Jammu turning into a serious agitation. I would often see Sheikh Abdullah calling on Bakshi at the latter's residence. They would exchange views in the interior chamber of Bakshi Sahib.

The position of Sheikh was getting critical owing to everyday clashes between security personnel and Dogra agitators. I got the impression that the Dogras were not averse to Bakshi and would prefer him at the helm of affairs.

In May 1953, Bakshi took reins of the government as Prime Minister of J&K state, after Sheikh was dismissed and arrested by the Government of India.

In winter of 1953, I was again flown to Jammu and allotted a separate bedroom and bathroom adjacent to one allotted to Mr D P Dhar. So again the two of us started meeting often. One night I heard his painful groans that had awakened me. Somewhat rattled, I woke up Shama and asked to have D P Sahib checked up. She woke her parents and a doctor was called. Mr Dhar, I learnt, had a heart attack and was given some injections. He was well within a day or two. This time we got much closer, I still feel he had many humanitarian qualities. Sometimes I would dine with him along with my ward Shama

and Hajra Begum, Bakshi Sahib's mother. It was a family like feeling all the time all the way.

The Bakshi clan felt it was high time that Shama was married. Miss Mahmudda, a friend of mine, got the news through the grapevine. She wanted me to intercede on behalf of her younger brother Dr Naseer. I broached the subject with Begum Bakshi and Shama. Both daughter and mother had great confidence in me and asked me to go ahead with negotiations if I thought well of the boy. Further digging on this subject brought to my attention some affairs that the young doctor was having. After being hinted of the matter, Dr Naseer sent a bunch of love letters to be handed over to Shama — and to be burnt if she so desired. Burn she did this bunch of letters and said, "Parimoo Sahib, my parents and I have full faith in your judgment, if you consider Dr Naseer a good match for me, I shall accept his proposal." I thought since Dr Naseer had made a clean gesture by sending all those love letters, there was a clean slate for both of them. The whole matter was brought to the notice of Bakshi Sahib who left the final decision to Shama and in turn Shama left it to me. So all were ready for this alliance and Miss Mahmudda sent a big parcel of almonds and sweets to my home. I returned the parcel with a note that I should not be considered a matchmaker and that I have been a friend of hers in the past and remained so now.

A slip between the cup and the lip, that old adage, proved true in this case too.

In stepped Mr Majid Bakshi, brother of Bakshi Sahib and uncle of Shama, raising a serious objection to the proposed alliance. He impressed upon his brother that this alliance would weaken his political position, since GM Sadiq, a sworn rival of Bakshi

Sahib, was known to have close relations with Miss Mahmudda, the prospective groom's sister. It was projected that Mr Sadiq, of unreliable leftist leanings, would get more powerful with this alliance with Shama in the fold of Miss Mahmudda. So this proposal fell through.

A few days later Mr Majid asked me if I knew Professor Nasarullah, brother of Dr Habibullah of Drug Research Laboratories.

I knew Dr Habibullah well. I approached him and vaguely hinting asked for a photograph of his younger brother Mr Nassarullah, a lecturer in chemistry at SP College, Srinagar. I got the photograph and the marriage was fixed. On the marriage occasion I was asked to be present at the *nikah* ceremony, the first ever *nikah* ceremony I attended. My wife too was invited. She was seated next to a beautiful young girl with slight Nepali features. Soon the two got very friendly to each other, she was happily chatting without even trying to hint to my wife who she was. Ultimately not able to resist her curiosity my wife asked her, "Are you married?" The young lady said "Yes". My wife asked, "What is your husband's name and what does he do?" The young lady smiling shyly replied "Karan Singh. Dr Karan Singh is his name and he is the Sadre Riyasat". My wife was astounded with the revelation and the modesty of the Rani, the daughter-in-law of Maharaja Hari Singh. My wife and Rani mixed very well and became good friends.

I spent a fortnight at Pahalgam at Bakshi Sahib's resort and was lucky to get the company of another Bakshi family friend, the sitar player Satlal Setare. Bakshi Sahib loved listening to Satlal's renditions on sitar. He was with us for a week and Shama would go hiking up hilly tracks practically every morning. A rivulet of ice cold water flowed by the side of Bakshi

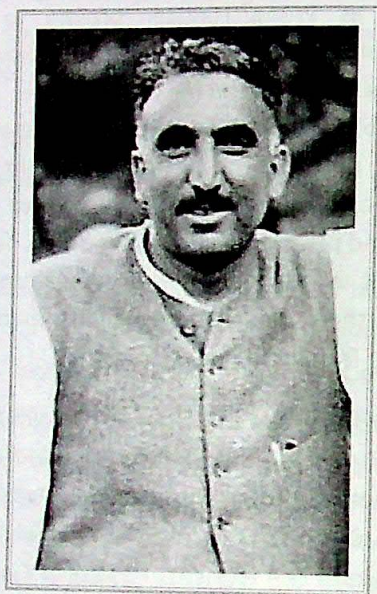
Sahib's hut. The music of its waters blended smoothly with Satlal's sitar creating a heavenly atmosphere.

Bakshi Sahib as Prime Minister proved to be an able administrator, organiser and a great stabilising power for Kashmir politics. The Kashmiri people were greatly upset with recent public disorder and upheaval following Sheikh's confrontationist policies. The new Government under Bakshi Sahib spared no pains to crush the disruptive elements and restore peace and prosperity of Kashmir again. To his statecraft goes the credit of calming down the Jammu region and restoring peace there too. He brought forth many reforms and made education free up to Masters Degree.

Jammu and Kashmir state has never ever known so peaceful a decade right up to 1964 when Bakshi sahib himself resigned under Kamraj plan, though he was not required to do so. He distributed his patronage liberally not only to his Muslim brethren but also to non Muslims, Pandits or Dogras alike.

However after his resignation, dame luck ditched him fast, Kashmir valley once again erupted in a frenzy as it was discovered that *Moi Mukadas* (the holy hair of Prophet Mohammed) was missing from Hazratbal shrine. This unfortunate happening, the disappearance of the holy hair, a relic of utmost importance to Kashmiris, and venerated by the Muslims plunged the valley into mass hysteria. The vested anti Bakshi elements in Kashmir politics linked this disappearance to the machinations of Bakshi brothers. This and the old accusations of fortunes made by Bakshi brothers tarred the image of this political stalwart. The forces, bent on finishing him as a political force for ever, managed to have a commission of enquiry sanctioned to probe the allegations of corruption against him. Justice Iyengar constituted the one-man commission. The

Commission's findings went against him and dejected he withdrew into shadows of anonymity.



Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed

Pandit Durga Prasad Dhar, DP

Sometime in 1941 Pt Jankinath Bhatt of Murran village, district Pulwama, invited me and my friend Pt MK Tickoo, affectionately called *Mohanji*, to his home in Murran for a few days' stay. On our way to Murran, while busy haggling over the charges of a *tonga*, a young rosy-cheeked youth got down from his bicycle to wish *Mohanji*, who introduced the young man to me as his junior lawyer, Mr DP Dhar, who had started practicing in the court a year back.

It was in 1945, I was talking to my friend Pt Dwarkanath Kachru, then the personal secretary to Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, at his father's residence in Srinagar, that I saw same young

man Mr DP Dhar, persistently trying to get an interview with Pt Kachru.

Unfortunately Pt Kachru died at the age of 30 in an air crash near Pathankot in 1950.

It was much later when I had to be at Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed's residence that I met this young man almost everyday, and from here DP and I became friends.

I found him a versatile, ebullient youth of a highly ambitious nature.

He befriended Bakshi to his advantage and spied on Sheikh and brought about his fall. Sheikh was the one with whose support DP had risen to the post of a Cabinet Minister. That didn't surprise me much, perhaps I already had seen something of that trait in him.

But what surprised and even shocked me was when I learnt of his pivotal role in the downfall of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed in conspiracy with Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq. His plan to finish Bakshi Sahib as a political force in Kashmir was executed with full support and blessings of Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq. On successful execution of another coup, DP was obviously rewarded with yet another Cabinet post in Sadiq's Cabinet.

However, his primacy in Kashmir politics came under a cloud with an unfortunate happening that shook the entire Pandit community as never before.

It is reported that one Kashmiri Pandit girl Parmeshwari, was kidnapped and forcibly married to a Muslim boy one Abdul Rehman against not only her parents' wishes but even her own too. An intense agitation was launched by Kashmiri

Pandits expecting some sympathetic support from DP who was the Home Minister. Instead, the peaceful procession consisting of old ladies in the vanguard was mercilessly beaten with vengeance by Kashmir police; following this they were fired upon, several got wounded, some seriously. One Pandit, Lassa Kaul Badami, was killed on the spot. His massive funeral procession in Srinagar and several spontaneous processions all over the State directed their ire particularly against the insensitive Home Minister DP Dhar.

He came under fire simultaneously from two quarters; the community of Pandits on the one hand, and Sadiq and other Muslims on the other, who blamed him for being incapable of handling even his own community members. As the pressure against DP was too intense, Sadiq bought peace by throwing him into the political dust bin.

But DP instead of throwing his hands up had another Machiavellian trick up his sleeve; his discreet relations with another political hopeful Mir Qasim were to grow stronger. So having joined hands, both DP and Mir Qasim waited their chance and chance did present itself with the untimely death of Sadiq. Sadiq died of kidney failure in 1971.

Never the one to rest, DP meantime had strengthened his bridges with Indira Gandhi, who took him in her Cabinet as Foreign Minister. India's relations with Pakistan were touching new lows, relations with the USSR needed strengthening to a much higher degree than before, as US attitude towards India was getting definitely inimical under President Nixon and his foreign secretary Henry Kissinger. DP was deputed to Kremlin as India's Ambassador. His statesmanship and charm brought India and the erstwhile USSR very close to each other.

This closeness proved a great asset to India in its historic victory against Pakistan and the creation of a new country Bangladesh. DP played a very prominent role in finalising the Shimla agreement with Pakistan, but obviously he was getting too ambitious for the liking of a bigger Machiavellian politician, Indira Gandhi.

DP was soon shunned and consigned to sidelines. Frustrated, he fell sick and expired in 1975 at the age of 58 in a Delhi hospital.

Pt Mohan Kishen Tickoo

Before writing these few lines, I had to debate with my own self whether it would be ethical on my part to write about a man who was just like my own brother, my lifelong friend and philosopher. Mohanji, as I affectionately called him, and me became friends in 1925. I unfortunately have lost contact with most of my friends owing to the militancy in the State, but Mohanji and me have managed to remain in contact till today, 21-8- 1994. Now he is 84, in bad health, a patient of Parkinson's, and shaken by the divorce of his youngest daughter. His son, an orthopaedic surgeon who has inherited all the noble qualities of his father, however, is a source of great solace and support to him in the twilight zone of his life.

Earning a gold medal from Delhi University, in law, Mohanji, began his legal practice under the able direction of Justice Kilam. Around this time Congress party had initiated an All India State Peoples' Conference under the presidentship of Sheikh Abdullah.



Shri M.K.Tickoo

Mohanji was elected its general secretary. The party was dedicated to giving vent to the sufferings of Indians grinding under the yoke of maharajas and *nawabs*.

Working as an advocate in the Kashmir High Court he was persuaded by the state government in December 1947 to work as a special magistrate in Baramulla, to ensure just and appropriate distribution of the booty seized from the retreating Pakistani tribesmen. A special waiver about age restrictions was made by the Cabinet so he could be taken for this job at the age 36, though the prescribed age restriction was 30 years.

In 1956 Mohanji was appointed special magistrate to try Sheikh Abdullah who had been charged for conspiring with Pakistan for cessation of Kashmir.

Pt Nilakanth Hak had earlier, from 1953 to 1956, presided the court to try Sheikh Sahib.

He was found guilty by this court and referred to be tried by a special court.

A special court was set up at Jammu, near the canal and both Sheikh and Mirza Afzal Beg were lodged in a building nearby.

Pt Mohan Kishen Tickoo was appointed the presiding judge of this historic trial that lasted for more than seven years.

Many criminal lawyers of all India eminence were engaged by the J&K government on the recommendations of Government of India. Each sitting of the court cost more than Rs 10,000, a considerable sum in those times.

When the governments of Kashmir as also the central government failed to convince the judge about the charges against Sheikh Sahib, they, both the governments, took the wise decision of withdrawing the charges and setting Sheikh and his colleagues free unconditionally!

After his release from the prison in Jammu, Sheikh came to Kashmir to a tumultuous welcome due to a hero, by the people. Astonishing as it was, the first thing Sheikh did on reaching Srinagar was to make a bee line to Tickoo household in the crowded Kanya Kadal area and pay respects to Shri Balbhadar Tickoo, Mohanji's father and congratulate him for having a son who never swayed from the path of truth and righteousness despite many temptations that were dangled before him. Begum Abdullah too was present on this occasion.

Nearly 22 years later, when Mohanji had retired from his job with the judiciary and was trying to build up again a legal practice after a long gap, Sheikh Sahib, to the surprise of all, inducted him as Minister of State for Law and Forests. After an

year or so he was made a full-fledged Cabinet rank Minister, a post he continued to hold till Sheikh Sahib's death in 1982.

He was made the Chairman of Legislative Council, the post he resigned after the fall of the GM Shah ministry.

Forced to leave his beloved Kashmir by the militants, he lived in the self-imposed exile at Gandhi Nagar, Jammu till he breathed his last. Even with a debilitating disease when most go hiding, this sensitive but stout heart continued to put forth his shock and disgust for the terror in Kashmir. The booklets he sent me and my granddaughter Seema are my pride possessions and will remain heirlooms for a long time to come, even after I am gone. I however cannot resist reproducing a few lines expressing his pathos:

When paralytic sores cause pain to his fleshless frame
To his parched lips comes a prayer, faint and feeble
scarcely audible.

Merciful Mother Parvati, the prodigal longs to return to
thee.

Kindly find for him a seat, somewhere near your feet.
If his history sheet stands in the way, he has only this
much to say,

Let your will be done, whatever the consequence.

Pt Prem Nath Bazaz

To be born a colossus in a land of pygmies or to be too far sighted when society around is myopic, leads only to sad and tragic situations. This is not an exaggerated statement when introducing one of the most misunderstood giants of Kashmir political scene, Shri Prem Nath Bazaz.

The man who was greatly successful in tempering and changing the rank communal politics of Sheikh Abdullah into a Kashmiri nationalist movement and imbibe it with the Kashmiri aspirations and Kashmiriyat that it implied, undoubtedly was Pt Bazaz.

Starting as a clerk in Public Works Department, this son of a police sub inspector had set his sights fixed elsewhere. He resigned his job and became a full time activist in the social reform movement started by Pt Aftab Kaul Nizamat. He was fully supported by his wife Smt Sonabatni Bazaz. She also had joined the movement.

However he showed his great negotiating abilities when he got close to Sheikh Abdullah, that time the leader of Kashmir Muslim Conference. Sensing Sheikh's intrinsic honesty of purpose, Bazaz convinced Sheikh to broaden his vision and father a real nationalistic movement that could reflect the ages old, suppressed desires of Kashmiri masses, and their ethos.

It was his nationalist fervour and not any hidden selfish agenda that goaded Bazaz Sahib to influence and persuade Sheikh Abdullah change his Muslim Conference mask to a mass appealing posture of a truly nationalist leader reflecting the aspirations of all Kashmiris irrespective of their caste or creed.

His tenacious adherence to Kashmir's independence and total dedication of state resources to uplift of Kashmiri masses was more than what was feasible to Sheikh Sahib, the practical politician, with the result both, not only parted company but became sworn enemies of each other. Pt Bazaz's opposition emanated from his belief that Sheikh Sahib was pawning the interests of Kashmiris for short term considerations. He however failed to spell in practicable terms what best could have been done to safeguard Kashmir in the face of an unprecedented savage aggression as unleashed by Pakistan and simultaneously safeguard the goal of an independent or even a semi-independent Kashmir. We find a parallel in history when Trotsky the idealist fell out with Lenin and Stalin in Russia.

Bazaz's originality of thought and rationalism, as forged into his mind by MN Roy's writings, first came to fore, and incurred him the disfavour of Pandit community, when he agreed to the recommendations of the Glancy Commission. This Commission was set by Maharaja under the persistent demand of the British to enquire into the 1931 Muslim uprising, and also to spell out the necessary administrative reforms needed.

The Glancy Commission, may it be recorded, was fair to the poor Muslim masses who formed the overwhelming majority of the valley. The comparatively well off Pandit community was incensed with Pt Bazaz for having endorsed the Glancy Commission recommendations. The fanatic elements of his own community treated him with unmentionable , uncivilised and disgusting acts of humiliation, forcing him to leave Kashmir at that time.

He settled in Hauz Khas area of Delhi and had named his residence *Ghaushi Augoor*, meaning the fountain of light.

Besides being a great thinker, Pt Bazaz was a prolific writer. He wrote a number of books mainly on the history and politics of Kashmir. His book *Daughters of Vitasta* deals with the struggles, and landmarks left by the women of Kashmir. Vitasta is the original name of river Jhelum; incidentally he has been gracious enough to mention me in that book.

Some of his other books include: *Inside Kashmir*, *Kashmir in crucible*, and *Azad Kashmir- a democratic and socialist concept*. His book *The history of struggle for Freedom of Kashmir* details the leaderless turmoil of 1931, which began the crystallisation process of the Muslim leadership after centuries of Afghan and Mughal rule, Sikh rule having lasted for just 27 years.

I recall a writers comment, "The onus for taking the process of truth and reconciliation forward, falls more on writers and historians...one of them was Prem Nath Bazaz".

I recall his faith in the Gita, he wrote a thesis on the *Bhagvad Gita* and would frequently recite its *shlokas* to begin his speeches while addressing Kashmiri Pandit gatherings. The same methodology to build quick rapport with audience was followed by Sheikh Mohdammad Abdullah when addressing huge gatherings particularly after Friday prayers in Jumma Masjid.

Later on he wrote a voluminous treatise on Gita titled, *Contradictions in Gita*.

Though I have mentioned Pt Bazaz's contributions as a journalist elsewhere in this book, I must, even at the risk of being repetitive, write about his talents as a journalist here too. It was *Sadaqat's* rank communalistic propaganda that inspired Pt Bazaz to start his weekly *Vitasta* to counter the

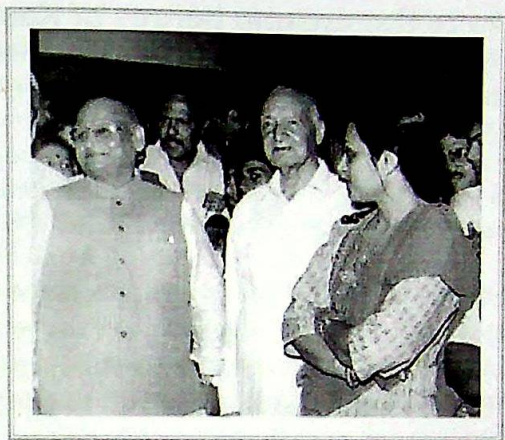
communal virus from being spread. *Martand* working towards a similar purpose too had itself started falling a prey to the Hindu communal virus.

Vitasta was printed and published from the top storey of a building located near the then picture hall Palladium, in Lal Chowk area. Pt Dina Nath Hanjura, my childhood friend was the editor of *Vitasta*.

Not content with *Vitasta*, the tireless campaigner that Shri Bazaz was, he started a Urdu daily *Hamdard* which shortly became a widely read daily in Kashmir.

In the year 1965, Shri Bazaz came to RS Pura, Jammu, where his nephew was working as a District Judge. I was the Principal of the Multilateral Institute. Bazaz Sahib heard about my being there and was gracious enough to call on me.

I visited him again in the twilight of his life when I called on him at his Hauz Khas residence, Delhi. Prostrate and bed ridden he tried to get up to embrace me. I spared him the trouble and sat down very close to him; there was no one there except one friend and a servant. He had lost his wife Smt Sona Batni much earlier, an irreplaceable companion and comrade of his life. He had lost a son too in a Mumbai accident. That must have been the last straw to break the camel's back. His end came when he was 69 years, in AIIMS Delhi, with his sons around him



**Shri Chiman Bhai Patel, ex.Chief Minister of Gujrat (left),
Shri D.N.Parimoo (centre)**

The stay in Gujrat of around 17 years too saw Pt.D.N.Parimoo get closely involved in the social and political scenario particularly with the Citizens' peace council and with eminent Gujarati politicians like the late Shri Chiman Bhai Patel, Ms Kokila Vyas and others.

A tribute to the unsung heroes of Kashmir

Every race or a nation has some heroes, exemplary men around which a race or a nation rallies to boost its sense of identity, individuality and indivisibility.

Kashmiris in particular have since the earliest times taken pride in their racial superiority.

Unfortunately for Kashmiris, Pandits in particular, the preoccupations with matters metaphysical, left our elders little time even to recall the names of our own heroes, the heroes of the Kashmiris, Muslims or Pandits, so that the posterity could hold its head high and claim the hallow of its Heroes.

One such name is Pandit Birbal Dhar, a name that holds an important, rather a crucial position, in the History of Kashmir. A name that should have been known to every Kashmiri child, but alas is not.

The early years of 19th century were years of turmoil and constant power struggles amongst the Afghan ruling factions and Kashmir being then a colony of the Afghan empire could not escape the devastating effects of an unsettled political situation in Kabul.

The lion of Punjab, great Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh had conquered Multan and was eyeing Kashmir. In 1914 he made a strong attempt to annex Kashmir but was thwarted in this attempt by the Afghans when his forces tried to enter the valley through a pass in Pir Panjal range. Some three thousand Sikh soldiers lost their lives in this battle; even a second battle lasting about eight days proved equally futile.

Azim Khan the acting Governor of Kashmir though elated over his victory over Sikh forces was realistic enough to understand that a second and stronger Sikh attack might not be easy to defend. This gnawing fear turned him into a rabid anti-Pandit Afghan Governor. He suspected the hand of Pandits in the

Sikh invasion and possibility of yet another invasion by Sikhs or even other Afghan war lords. His first major casualty was Pt. Hardass Tiku, whose brother, the distinguished diplomat Dewan Nand Ram Tiku was in Kabul and had access to several Afghan war lords. Pt. Hardass Tiku was publicly lynched.

Azim Khan had appointed three Pandit revenue collectors , namely Pt. Birbal Dhar, Mirza Pandit Dhar, and one Sukh Ram Safaya. Unabated natural calamities had reduced the revenue of the Valley and mismanagement by Afghan revenue collectors had forced Azim Khan to appoint these Pandits, even though he had come to hate and distrust the Kashmiris, particularly the Pandits. As the revenues dwindled the atrocities on Pandits increased. Unable to bear the atrocities and the indignities heaped on him and members of his community, Pt. Birbal Dhar hatched a heroic escape plan to garner Sikh support for the hapless Kashmiris in general and Pandits in particular.

It was the Muslim milkman Qudus Gujar who risking his life gave full support to Pt. Birbal Dhar by hiding the Pandit's wife and daughter-in-law in the safety of his cowshed.

One dark night, Pandit Birbal, escaped and reached Kulgam in disguise where he picked his son Rajkak. From here the journey to Jammu via Banihal over the untrodden paths was enabled by members of the Mullick family, the Muslim wardens of the Pir Panjal passes.

Safe in Jammu, Birbal the great adventurer and the courageous diplomat convinced the Dogra nobility headed by Raja Ghulab Singh, about the feasibility of his plan for abolition of Afghan rule with the help of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

In general the Dogra Nobility was sympathetic to Pandit Birbal and favoured him with an introduction to the Prime Minister of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Raja Dhyani Singh, brother of Raja Ghulab Singh.

In the Sikh court,Pt. Birbal's proposal was examined by the Sikhs very critically and ultimately he accomplished his mission by convincing Maharaja Ranjit Singh about the possibility of a victory over Afghans in Kashmir.

A military force under distinguished Sikh military leaders like Hari Singh Nalwa,Raja Ghulab Singh and diplomat Dewan Misr Chand accompanied by Pt. Birbal Pandit was dispatched to Kashmir, but this time via the Mughal route from Bhimber.

Pt. Birbal's son Rajkak however was kept as a hostage by Sikhs.

The Sikh army first defeated the Afghans at Hirapur and then finally routed them at Shopian.

Azim Khan hearing of the defeat at Shopian ran away in haste, leaving the State into the hands of his notorious brother Jabbar Khan.

Thus a more than five hundred year old Afghan rule in Kashmir was put to an end by the determined efforts of one Kashmiri, Pt.Birbal Dhar.

This victory of his however left a bloody trail and he personally paid dearly for his accomplishment. His wife and daughter-in-law hiding with the milkman Qudus Gujar were betrayed by none other than his own son-in- law possibly for some monetary gain or may be under duress.

His wife committed suicide and his daughter -in -law was forcibly taken to Kabul after her suicide attempt failed.

Pt. Vaaskak Dhar ,transport and communication in charge was murdered on suspicion of helping Birbal.

Qudus Gujar(goor) and his family were brutally murdered and the Mullicks were deprived of their properties.

Poets of Kashmir...that I knew

Kashmiri poetry of the modern period starts with the beginning of 19th century. Prior to that, in the early stages, Kashmiri was dominated by the court languages, first Sanskrit and later by Farsi (Persian). These were the languages preferred and patronised by the court, the nobles and the intelligentsia. Kashmiri language and its origin, the Sharda language never got any court patronage and were confined to the masses.

Initially Kashmiri poets tended to follow the poetic patterns set by the Persian poets. From 1819 onwards was the period when Kashmir produced poetry both rich and prolific. Described hereunder are the more modern but most important of Kashmiri poets who have created a secular, cosmopolitan character of Kashmiri poetry.

Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor

Mahjoor, one of the most respected and popular poets of Kashmir, woke the Kashmiri masses. He took Kashmiri poetry out of the elitist and intellectual small circles to the people toiling in the fields with bent backs, his poems swayed the old and young alike.

I vividly remember the day I met him for the first time.

All schools were in the midst of examination season and though I was visiting most schools at this time in my capacity as Inspector of Schools deputed by the Education Ministry of J& K state, I had not visited Arigam, a not-so-easily accessible village in district Badgam. It was a sunny day, the sky was clear, I had sent an intimation to the headmaster at Arigam to expect me. I asked my peon to arrange the best pony that he could hire for me to go there.

On reaching Arigam I found the teacher in charge had assembled the village nobility with their *patwari* as the head to receive me. The *patwari*, a slim tall man, wearing an *achkan* buttoned to the neck and a snow white turban, garlanded me. My soul was touched by his captivating smile.

This charming dignified young man was Ghulam Ahmad. He called himself Mahjoor, a name that gave him fame and popularity that few Kashmiri poets have enjoyed or can aspire for.

It was he and not the teacher who conducted me inside the school compound that was decorated with buntings and flowers in honour of my visit.

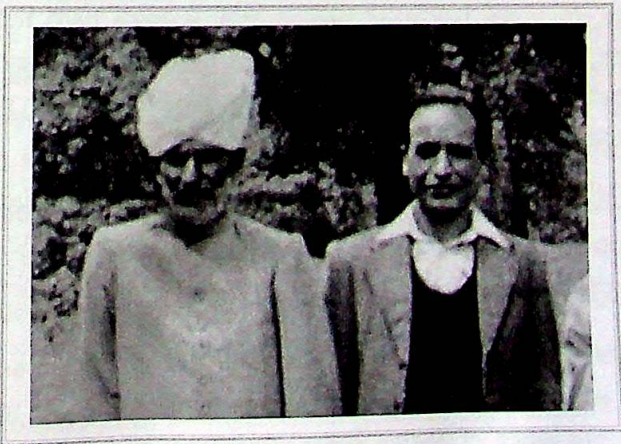
Inside the school compound the atmosphere was tense because of the ongoing examination. The teachers were hoping for a good performance from the students while the parents and guardians silently prayed for the success of their wards. I attended to my duties as an Inspector and also exchanged soothing words with the parents and guardians.

In the evening our dinner was hosted by the village elders and their beloved *patwari*, Mahjoor; it was more or less a community dinner. As the night advanced, a select group of

village singers assembled with their musical instruments – the *sarangis*, *tumbakhnaris* and the *Kashmiri natus*. I was entranced by the melodious songs they sang one after another. I was then informed by the teacher that these songs were all Mahjoor's creations. Mahjoor was still there accompanying us and I noticed his face wore a glow of grace and a halo of humility.

Some of the songs that were sung during that unforgettable evening in presence of the master himself, have become the gems of Kashmiri poetry, they included, "*Baghe Nishat key gulo naaz karaan karaan walo*," O you lovely flower of the Nishat garden, come, come to me with all your coquetry, then a devotional one:

"*Sahibo sath chhamm mey chaini, vath mey aslich haavtam kutha kaal roza' bezaban alim-u-koi mas chavtam*". (Oh God almighty, I lay my dependence on you, and on you alone, lead me on the righteous path. How long should I remain ignorant? Pray intoxicate me with the wine of knowledge).



Mahjoor(left) with Pt DN Parimoo

My contact with this great poet at Arigam turned into an everlasting friendship. He often called on me at my Srinagar residence at Nayi Sarak.

Once on the express desire of my brother-in-law, Dr Moti Lal Dhar, I arranged a picnic at Nishat Bagh where Mahjoor Sahib sat with my friend Mohan Kishen Tickoo, Doctor Dhar, my eldest son and me for lunch.

Once Mahjoor jokingly narrated to me how while touring the undivided Punjab, his zeal to write in Urdu was doused by some Urdu purists of UP and Punjab, who patronisingly asked Mahjoor to correct his *talafuz*(accent) and remedy his Kashmiri diction before he could hope to be listened to seriously. This must have been a very unkind cut to this sensitive man especially as it came from people who in terms of intrinsic worth were nowhere in comparison to this beacon of light from Kashmir. Mahjoor never ever spoke of his Urdu poems again.

Mahjoor remained almost unknown even to the literary public of Kashmir for a long time. His popularity rose from the grass roots, from the labourers singing after a day's hard toil, at night on the steps of closed shops of bazaars where lay the homeless, in the gardens, hummed by gardeners and in fields by the peasants, men and women alike.

It was left to a giant of Indian literature, living in far off Bengal to introduce the Kohinoor of Pulwama to his own countrymen and the world at large.

Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Laureate of India, was the man who discovered Mahjoor. He was fond of listening to the recorded lyrics of Indian poets. Somehow a disc had been cut of Mahjoor's lyrics and it found its way to Tagore. It was

played on a gramophone in 1930 by his literary secretary, Satyarthi. Tagore recognised this genius even if far away. He sent Satyarthi to find out who Mahjoor was.

Satyarthi stayed in Srinagar for a fortnight but didn't learn anything about Mahjoor or of where he resided, though at that time Mahjoor had a humble dwelling in Tankipura which was just about a 100 yards away from the Commissioner's office, which was adjacent to Shergadi, the Old Secretariat. His village Metreegam was in Pulwama *tehsil*, nobody even mentioned his name when I was at Pulwama. So unknown was Mahjoor even in his own birthplace.

One day before the disappointed Satyarthi, unable to trace this poet genius of Kashmir, was to leave back for Calcutta, Mahjoor was returning home from his office at Arigam and being tired he decided to take a *tonga*. As destiny would have it Satyarthi also took a seat in the same *tonga* and sat right next to Mahjoor. Impressed with Mahjoor's bearing and his white turban, Satyarthi tried his luck by asking Mahjoor who Mahjoor was! This question coming from a total stranger and what was more a non Kashmiri, alarmed Mahjoor. Satyarthi sensing his co passenger's hesitation immediately revealed his identity and briefed him about his mission. Mahjoor took Satyarthi home with him and talked about his works. Satyarthi extended an invitation to Mahjoor on behalf of Tagore and thus was Mahjoor the *Shayar e Kashmir* born to the world of literature.

Following our meet at Arigam, friendship between Mahjoor and me continued to blossom.

He often shared with me issues he felt strongly about.

One day I talked to him about Master Zind Kaul the outstanding poet philosopher of Kashmir. He asked me to convey the following to Masterji:

"*Ya Khudaya ta abad zindh rozin Zindh Kaul*" (Oh God may Zind Kaul live long till eternity).

Once in great anguish he spoke to me about the atrocities of National Conference *Halqa*, the area committees. It seems there was one Nabir Bhatt, a minor leader of an area committee of National Conference who allegedly committed rape of a lady, who in due course delivered a baby. Mahjoor penned a satire in protest which was banned by the authorities. It went something like this "*Nabir Bhattni gari pyayi azadi...*" (It cut both ways. In the home of Nabir Bhatt, Azadi-independence, took birth).

On a later date he said "*Mahjoor zara bas kar- pari kus yi Ishaq daftar-Thav shok dilas ander-lollas chhi khatimait laade*" (Mahjoor now stop singing love songs. Who will read all these love files. Restrict your fervour within your heart, the loves' files have piled up and up).

As a good friend he confided in me about his disillusionments with the doings of National Conference regime. He himself was far above communalism but was aghast with what he had never experienced. A soft-spoken God fearing man content with what he had in life, he refrained from criticising or expressing anger.

In private he once recited a poem titled 'India' to me. He recited a couplet "*zuv jaan wandh ha hindustanus – Dil chhum Pakistanus seeth*". (Only a poetic heart can appreciate the real sense of the couplet which roughly translates to 'I give my life and soul for India. My heart is with Pakistan').

After his retirement from the government job, he was engaged by a *wakf* committee to construct a *masjid* in Pakherpora village. He accepted the job on a measly monthly remuneration. This greatly incensed his disciple in poetry, Abdul Ahd Dar Azad who took great objection to Mahjoor being employed by a *wakf*. He sent a note through me to Mahjoor in the form of a satirical couplet: "*Tagore saiban lola mas Bengali malirean bor-Mahjoor saiban tul akis natwari Pakherpur.*"

(Tagore Sahib filled pitchers of Bengal with the wine of love, Mahjoor Sahib made construction of (little) Pakherpura mosque his goal!)

Once Mahjoor and I were commissioned to organise Habba Khatun day. We were lodged in a houseboat along with Mr Kazmi, the Director and Kh Nurudin, the Deputy Director of Education Department to make the event, a gala function. Our houseboat was moored near the historical ruins of Panthachuk. That was the last time we spent together.

He breathed his last while in Srinagar and was taken to Michhir Gam, his birthplace, for burial. Bakshi Sahib the Prime Minister of J&K state, did not like this idea and got his body exhumed and shifted first to Shah-e Hamdan mosque and then carried in a military vehicle bedecked with flowers to Panthachuk, a lovely village on the banks of Jhelum, where Habbakhatun the nightingale of Kashmir lies buried. There his body at last was laid to rest in 1953.

His son Mohidin who was working in the Government publication department traced me out in Mumbai to collect a paper on his father. He would visit me off and on till shortly before his untimely death soon after the demise of his father.

Mahjoor's grandson once organised a Mahjoor Day on Doordarshan and also got a special number published in Urdu. He had my article *Mahjoor ek dost ki nazar mein* (Mahjoor as a friend) published in this commemorative magazine.

Abdul Ahd Dar

Abdul Ahd Dar was virtually the harbinger of the revolutionary poetry in Kashmir. Though he did not live long he left an indelible mark on our literature.

October 1944, the fall season had started of late, the Chinar trees were splendid in their golden garb but the sun still shone bright. I was on way to Zoohama, a village in the Badgam district, for a surprise inspection of the school there.

On entering the school, I found the head teacher, one Shri Razdan, dozing in the chair while the students of his class were busy writing something. I hastily beat the retreat in order not to disturb the students and entered another class room expecting a similar scene there.

To my amazement, I was greeted with a respectful *salaam* by a medium-sized youth of a slightly dark complexion, large wide eyes, a snub nose and a dark moustache. He wore a shirt of a coarse, coloured cloth, a dark brown loose coat and a *shilwar*. He was wearing the old type of Kashmiri footwear called *paizar*, with heavy iron nails to strengthen the sole. In spite of his rag tag regalia he looked a conscientious, charming fellow. There were several reed pens he had kept ready for his students and was in the process of making more. I was surprised at his dedication. He had written some lines in beautiful calligraphic style for his students to copy and some of the students had done their work admirably.

After greeting me he again got busy with his work, unmindful of my presence. I stood gazing at this dedicated man who was a born teacher. I was amazed when he told me that he himself had studied only up to fifth standard yet his method of teaching, his sincerity of purpose, the natural delivery of his lesson and the response he commanded from his class was to be seen to be believed. Highly impressed, I noted my impressions in the school log book and left the school. When I was about to ride my horse, I found to my surprise this young man holding the reins of my horse and detaining me. On my enquiring what he wanted, he very politely asked me to stay back and be his guest at his residence which was in Rangar village about a mile from Zoohama. I was in no mood to spend the night at a nondescript far flung village but his pleading manner prevailed and I accepted his invitation. The village he took me to, was far from a graceful one unlike most of Badgam villages, but the part of his house where he lodged me, was called by him his Dewan Khana which was a pleasant surprise. There were some musical instruments, some pictures tastefully framed and loads and loads of books in glass windowed old fashioned almirahs. A big *dari* covered the floor and pillows along the walls provided comfort while reclining.

In the evening half a dozen youths assembled with the typical Kashmiri musical instruments and a few boys amongst those wore colourful costumes and anklets with small bells (*ghungroo*). Music and dancing went on till late in the night. Each bewitching song ended with the name Azad. Meanwhile Azad sat shyly by my side, modesty written largely over his face.

Then it dawned on me that my host was a literary genius of a very high calibre though so humble a man.

He showed me his voluminous works, his collection of poems his treatise on Kashmiri poets and his passion for revolutionary poetry. His handwriting was beautiful and everything was written in black ink.

We met several times after this meeting. He would always visit me when in Srinagar and our relations turned more friendly than official.

His long poem *Daryav* or the 'river' is a masterpiece. He has ridiculed romance in the face of poverty, want and hunger. *Madanvaro lagay paeree, ba no zara ashqa bemari. Tse saet gachhi fursatha aasen, dilas gachhi faragatha aasen, me gaematch nael naadari, ba no zara ashqa bemari* - 'My love! Romance is not my cup of tea. It needs leisure and peace of mind. I have none and I am crestfallen due to my poverty. So no romance for me, please'.

He recited to me any fresh poem that he would pen down, these included: *Daryav* (River); *Ishaq-u-Aqal* (Love and Wisdom) *Shikvayi*- *Iblis* (Complaint of Satan to God) - all very strong poems. Here I quote a few lines from each:

Darayav (River)

Challan chhum shar hubaban izitiraban valvalan andhar
Yivaan chhum zindagi hund soze safaran manzillan
andhar,

I get utter satisfaction in my restlessness and in the state
of agitation and excitement I enjoy the music of life in
my sojourns and ever new places

Mei adath chhoi na path ferun,
mey nish gav bronhkunuyi neyrun

*Na chhus gul ,pan chhum sherun,
na bulbul oal chhum yeroon*
It is not my habit to retreat,
I am born to advance ahead.
I neither am a flower to decorate myself,
nor a nightingale to weave my nest.

Ishaq - u - Akal (Love and Wisdom)

Aqal wanaan bandhgi,Ishq wanaan zindgi
Aqal wanaan mohar dyaar, Ishq wanaan yar yar
Wisdom denotes bondage, love cries for life(a free one)
Wisdom means gold and wealth,love cries for love and
more love
Aqal bakhat ta miras myun-takhat ti meeras myon
Ishk-bakhat ti bey eyetibar,takha ti bey eyetibar
Wisdom- my legacy is fortune, power and throne
Love- fortune is undependable and so is power and
throne.

The last poem he recited to me was :

Shiqvayi Iblis(Satan's complaint to God)

Marun chhu lookan ,tscey maa marun chhoyi
Na deun hissabayi na dyun bayaanai
People have to die, not you oh God.
Nor are you accountable, nor do you owe a clarification

Marun ti zevan kyuth bichara adam-
tschi aundh ruzith wachhan tamasha
It is poor Adam who undergoes the cycles of life and
death
You enjoy the spectre from a distance

*Tscha Amiran handoyi Amira, haya gacchan chhum-wanit
hakakyah*

*Ameer duethum garib mazas- do hayi banawaan
waazwaana*

You are the richest of the rich, modesty prevents me
from saying things at your face

I witness the rich daily making a feast of the poor.

This poem was published as a pamphlet with 60 verses. Mirza Afzal Beg, a very strong minister of Sheikhs' cabinet and his brother Mirza Arif Beg wanted to bring a criminal suit against Azad, terming this poem as blasphemy, but Sheikh Sahib persuaded them to hush the matter in the larger interests of public peace.

One day Azad was brought from his village Rangar in a critical condition, and we rushed him to Rattan Rani hospital for Dr ON Thussu to attend to him. But it was too late, his appendix had burst and the infection had spread. He died at the age of 45, in 1948.

Azad once confided to me that his poetry started gushing out when his romance with a Hindu girl at Rangar, came to a tragic end, when the girl committed suicide.

Pt Dina Nath Nadim

After 1947, National Conference was for all practical purposes divided into two camps though the division was not public. One was the Sheikh- Bakshi group and the other Sadiq – Mir Qasim group.

The divide was like a three legged stool: Sheikh Abdullah and Mirza Afzal Beg with an Islamic independent Kashmir vision, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, Abdul Gani Trali and Shyam Lal

Saraf, of an India agenda and Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq and Mir Qasim, brandished a near non-existent leftist lobby. Sadiq and Mir Qasim lacking any public support worth the name started a Cultural Front trying to involve some of the Indian leftists like Sardar Jaffery, an eminent Urdu writer living in Mumbai.

A wave was sought to be created in Kashmir, under the guise of peace appeal signature campaign, to enlist the support of the young politically directionless students.

Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq patronised these elements with the sole purpose of showing his "might" to his political opponents.

Pt Dina Nath Nadim was a teacher in Hindu high school, Badiyar who got willingly involved in the same culture bait of Sadiq and verily tried to become the poet of the peasant labour movement, a niche already won over effortlessly by Mahjoor and Azad. It was his first poem "*wazul wazul yi khoon myon, yi khoon myon*" (This red blood of mine, that initially swayed the intellectuals of Kashmir).

Soon he realised that the "red red" cry of his wasn't cutting much ice with the toilers for whom it was intended, so he shifted more to the soft Mahjoor style rhythms in his *Bambro Bambro* and other writings that gave him a respectable position amongst the Kashmiri poets. He passed away in the year 1986.

Any talk about Kashmiri poets and poetry will be incomplete without mentioning the great poets of ancient fame, whom I have never met but who continue to be alive even today in the peoples' minds and have given Kashmiri poetry an everlasting form and popularity.

Maqbool Kralawari

Maqbool, known for his lyrics which are mostly satires, belonged to Kralwari, a small village of District Badgam. All Kralwaris are proud of him and consider a slight if an educated man doesn't know of Maqbool's writings.

Neither I nor any of my contemporaries have met him, but he is too big a giant of Kashmiri literature to be omitted.

Maqbool has written a big volume called *Gris Nama* (The Peasant's Diary). Though himself a peasant he seems to be a sophisticate or even a snobbish one at that. Writing in Farsi he says "*Greestu agar Auliya bashad, kabil booriya heist*"

(If a peasant is even an Auliya (a great man), he won't be worth even a sheet to cover his floor with).

In one very fine idea about love he says:

*Khudaya Ishaq rostayi kanh ma aesin-Karin aashiqean
gadaie, shah ma aesin !*

Oh God let there be none without the pangs of love. Better to beg of love than to be a king - which in spirit is close to : Better to have loved and lost than never have loved at all.

In a similar vein Maqbool says:

*Ajab ranga diuthum yi sodayi ulfat, godayi meheri mohabat,
ada kyazi nafrat*

Curious is the commodity of love. In the beginning there is love and kindness and it all ends in hatred.

Habba Khatun

The brilliance of Mahjoor or revolutionary zeal of Azad could not diminish the popularity of some historically important poets of Kashmir. It was Zoon in the 16th century who introduced poetry in romantic form. She later gained fame as **Habba Khatun** the queen of Kashmir, as famous as she was for her looks she was for her poetry. Emergence of a new theme was seen in the poetry of Zoon. She has sung songs of love, separation, and ill treatment at the hands of the in-laws and the languorous feelings of heart. Kashmiri poetry thus departed from the abstract spiritual to the material human level. Her lament was, *Varivyan saet vara chhasno chara kar myon malino ho* – I am not at peace with my in-laws, and would somebody come to my rescue from my father's side?

Habba Khatun introduced *lola* to Kashmiri poetry; *lola* is the Kashmiri equivalent to the English lyric. It conveys one brief thought full of melody and love.

Zoon was born in the village of Chandrahar in the 16th century. She grew up in the midst of the saffron fields and in the shade of the chinar trees. She was not raised as a typical peasant girl. She had learnt how to read and write from the village *maulvi*. Zoon was married at an early age, as was the norm then, to an illiterate farm lad and the marriage failed. The illiterate peasant boy held no charm for Zoon who was at very high mental plane. There were few around her in that small village who could understand the longings of her heart. Just like Lal Ded, Zoon also was drooping like a weeping willow, sad and morose all the time. Eventually Zoon divorced her husband and started singing songs in Kashmiri. She used to sing her own songs in the cool shade of a *chinar* tree.

One day Yusuf Shah Chak, the heir apparent of Kashmir, was out hunting on horseback.

He happened to pass the place where Zoon was singing unmindful of his presence. He heard her melancholic melodies and stole a glance of her; only to be stunned by her beauty. It was love at first sight for both. Later, Zoon and Yusuf Shah were married. She then changed her name to Habba Khatun.

The couple was very happy together and at peace with the world and Yusuf Shah became the Sultan of Kashmir. Their happiness however did not last long. Emperor Akbar came to power in Delhi and anxious to reinstall the Mughal supremacy of Kashmir, he summoned Yusuf Shah to Delhi. In 1579 Yusuf Shah was charged with sedition and revolt and sent to far off Bihar for life imprisonment.

Thus Habba Khatun was separated from Yusuf Shah and her life became one of perpetual lament. Her melancholic songs are full of sorrow and pain of separation. Thus sang Habba Khatun(English rendering of her Kashmiri song) :

Which adversary of mine has snared you away from me?
Why are you cold towards me?
Forget the anger and the annoyance
you are my only love,
Why are you cold towards me?
My garden is blooming with colourful flowers,
Why are you away from me?
My love, my only love, I think only of you,
Why are you cold towards me?
I keep my doors open half the night,
Come and enter my door, my jewel,

Why have you forsaken the path to my house?
Why are you cold with me?

Rasul Meer

Never before had Kashmiri poetry got a bold and candid expression of love and romance as it got from Rasool Meer. He was the one who freed Kashmiri poetry from the twin bondage of mysticism and obsession with the Farsi language. Nothing is known with certainty about his birth except that he was born in Dooru, a village in district Anantnag, and that he lived in the last decade of 19th century.

He has written beautiful love poems popular with people even today. His popular poem, which some critics consider to be the inspiration of Nadim's *Bambro Bambro*...is '*Rinda posh maal gind ne drayi lolo, shubi shabash chani pot tshayi lolo* -My beloved flower garland, Poshmaal, also a name amongst Kashmiri women, has come out to play in an ecstatic mood, praiseworthy is the shadow that follows her'. This poem continues to enjoy its wide popularity even today; the description in the next line is noteworthy. '*Raza hanziyani naaz kyah aenzini gardan, ya Illahi chashmi bad nishi rachhtan, kam kyah gatshi chani baargahi lolo* - The beautiful one has a neck like a swan's, God! Save her from the evil eye, this won't make you poorer anyway.'

Rasul Meer was the first poet who addressed his poems specifically to a female beloved. The earlier poets had made a male their love icon, perhaps because they were pointing to the Divine and not the human.

The poets of Kashmir were more philosophical than romantic. In fact the seeds of spirituality have been deeply sown in

the valley. The confluence of various religious schools like Buddhism, Brahmanism and Islam coupled with the deeply philosophical mindset produced great spiritual leaders who left indelible marks on Kashmiri music, art, architecture, gastronomy and culture in general.

Spirituality in the Paradise

Every country produces personalities who mirror its predominant culture, its native intellect and the zeitgeist. Though most regions of India have produced persons of mystical temperaments and spiritual inclinations, Kashmir from the earliest of times has produced many more than one would expect, given its relatively small population. Whether it is because of the enhanced sensibilities of its inhabitants with matters spiritual or its salubrious climate, the bountiful nature, the strong mystical influence of its numerous saint poets, or the periodic visitations of misfortunes natural or manmade, is hard to tell. Quite likely it is the outcome of a combination of all the factors.

The magnetic attraction of Kashmir on ascetics and persons of spiritual mental frame can be gauged from the fact that researchers of religious history like the famous Russian scholar traveller, Holger Kersten, feel convinced that Jesus having survived the crucifixion, wandered for 16 years all over Western Europe, Turkey and Persia before he finally chose the valley of Kashmir as his final and last abode.

According to the supporters of Kersten's view, mother Mary, who accompanied Jesus, expired at a place called Marri of J&K state and is buried in a tomb there known as Mai Mari Da

Asthan. Jesus himself seems to have earned fame and devout following in Kashmir as Yuss Pir, and is believed to be buried in central Srinagar city at a place called Roza Bal.

One of the very earliest spiritual healing experiences I have had was when I was about two years old, that is in the year 1913. As narrated to me by my parents, relentless fever had gripped me for nearly a month and there seemed little chance for my survival. My parents, understandably were in great distress and in a state of helplessness, when a saintly cousin of my father, suggested that I be taken to **Pt Anandji** the *mastana* of Shopian town. My parents travelled on horseback and on foot for three days, to put me at the feet of this saint, beseeching for his mercy with eyes full of tears.

Anandji who was given to smoking *charas* (*hashish*), after smoking his *chillum*, asked for a bucket of water and to the horror of my parents, poured the water all over me.

Imagine how I must have howled. Picking me up and putting me in the lap of my mother, Anandji said, "Take him, he will serve you till your end." Prophetic words they proved to be!

Another first-hand experience I could narrate, is about **Gratah Bab**, the mystic saint of Acchabal, who was also called Gratah *Mot* (the mad Gratah) out of love.

I was posted at Uttarsu (Wotrasoo) in those days. My first born son fell critically ill. Apparently he had eaten too many sour cherries, this gave him unabated diarrhoea.

He was getting visibly dehydrated. We lost hope and my landlord one Pt Raja Ram advised us to go immediately to see Gratah Bab. I carried my son in my arms, for about 12

km to catch a *tonga* at Acchabal, for our onward journey to Anantnag. Once there I left my son before the mystic and all my 12 companions from Uttarsu village begged in unison for the saint to show mercy to the little child. Gratah Bab sprinkled some ashes over my son. In a matter of less than an hour I felt my son getting better. In a few days he regained his health completely, but his weakness for sour cherries, still remains even when he is past 55 years.

Many years later I accompanied Khwaja Nurudin, my superior officer, to Gratah Bab, he told Nurudin "*Wuni chhu thadun*" (You will still grow higher!).

Only after a short while Nurudin was appointed vice-chancellor of J&K University.

Gratah Bab had given me a wooden stick with a tuft of horse hair fixed to it, may be a device to ward off flies; it remains among my prized possessions.

Pt Parmanad of Nagom

My several visits to Nagom Village in connection with my official duties enlightened me about this sage though I never could meet him as he had expired even before my birth. Born in Martand he worked as *patwari* of Nagom. From all accounts, he was a great yogi who lived in the middle of 19th century and expired in 1903. Pt Parmanand has written a memorable long poem wherein he has compared the human actions with tilling of the land, right from ploughing up to the time of reaping the harvest. '*Karma bhumikayi dizi dharmuk bal, santoshi byali bhavi aananda phal* –your actions are the land where you must put in the fertiliser of righteousness. Sow the seed of contentment and you will reap the harvest of supreme bliss.' I

herewith reproduce a few of his lines:

'Ha, pana kyazi chhuk na vicharan,yeti larun kenh chhoi no!

Yeti larun chhuvi paan tarun,yeti larun kenh chhoi no!

Oh self why don't you realise that (from) here you will go empty handed. The only thing that you can do is to cross the ocean of transitions and of the mundane world.'

You have two breaths, inhaling and exhaling, like a pair of oxen at work. Strike these oxen with the whip of your self control. Be careful nothing of your spiritual self remains idle. Sow the seeds of dharma to your field of action. The maddening youth will soon get tired and helpless. Some moments of our lives thus are lost. Again sow the seeds of self realisation, and contentment, to enjoy eternal peace. Use the sickle of dispassion to harvest the crop of contentment. Destroy the musk rats of restless mind within you and enhance the force of dharma, the righteous path.

Roop Bhawani, Rishi Peer, Sahib Kaul, Kasha Kak, Nandlal, Lakshman Joo, Sati Devi and Mathura Devi are some other great names in the long list of Kashmiri saint poets.

Here I have deliberately not mentioned either the great Hindu saint Lallishwari nor the highly adored Sheikh ul Alam, also known as Nand Rishi, for they both belonged to the liberal, non missionary, non conformist breed of *rishis*: the poet, philosopher, free thinkers, saints having roots deep in the soil of their land.

Roop Bhawani is believed to have been born around 1620-24, daughter of one Pt Madhavjoo Dhar of Safa Kadal, Srinagar. Her date of death is observed as *Sahib Satam* by Kasmiri Pandit

community. Her *vaks*, in the tradition of Lal Dedh's tradition of recognising one's self have been documented by late Har Bhat Shastri.

Mathura Devi is a contemporary saint still fresh in my memory just as Pt Nandalal is.

She was born at Verinag, daughter of one Pt Har Kaul. Married early at the age of 14 or 15 years, she lost her husband in a few years time. Helped by her brother she did her meditation for several years on the banks of Jhelum near Verinag, living in a small hut built by her brother for her. Thereafter she shifted to Durga Nag, Srinagar, where she lived for quite a number of years, looked after well by her innumerable disciples. Again she was shifted back to Verinag by her kin in 1967 where she lived to a ripe old age. She died in 1985.

The Kashmiri culture has been shaped by the original Hindu and Buddhist religious civilisations highly modified and reconstructed by the Rishi and Sufi influences introduced in 14th and 15th centuries. The most important and towering personality of Sufis is that of Sayeed Ali Hamdani or Shah e Hamdan, as Kashmiris call him. Born in 1314, he came to Kashmir from Iran first time in 1372 with several hundred of his followers. He is credited with major role in Islamisation of Kashmir. During his subsequent visits he formed a strong and influential bastion of Islamic culture and preaching in Kashmir. His son Sayeed Mohammed Hamdani followed him in 1394 and stayed put in Kashmir for around two decades pursuing his father's goal of spreading Islam in Kashmir, though in a much more aggressive manner than that of his illustrious father.

Near Pattan is the tomb of a *rishi* named Baba Piyumdin, who is reported to have expired in 15th century. His *ziarat* is one of

the highly venerated ziarats of Kashmiri *rishis*. The *rishi* order reached its zenith during Mughal rule, on account of the respect and patronage shown to them by emperors, Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan .After these great Mughals, *rishis* lost their importance and gradually disappeared in rest of India.

Many of our chroniclers and historians tend to bracket Sufis with *rishis*.

The Sufi order has always been highly influenced by the preachers of their various countries of origin, while the *rishis* have been greatly drawing from the Kashmiri mystical traditions though accepting the best of Sufism.

In the *rishi* order two names stand tall, the Hindu born lady Lallishwari commonly known as Lal Ded and her 30 years junior Sheikh Nur ul Alam also known as Nund Rishi

Sayeed Mohammed Hamdani was highly impressed by Sheikh Nur ul Alam and tried to cajole him into joining his camp and following his line of religious fervour. Frustrated by Sheikh Nur ul Alam's independence of mind and originality of thought, Mohammed Hamdani, however allowed him undisturbed meditation in the peaceful environs of his campus.

To understand the radically different approaches adopted by father Ali Hamdani and son Mohd. Hamdani, it is desirable to get oneself acquainted with the basic differences between radical Islam and Sufism. As Sufism is inward looking of mystical and spiritual dimensions, the more fundamentalist believers consider it outside the realm of Islam.

Jalal u Din Rumi of Iran, perhaps the greatest of the Sufi poets and saints puts this dilemma very succinctly:

' I am a lover of both his benevolence and severity.
Amazing it is that I am in love with these opposites.'

A common criticism by fundamentalists is that Sufism is an innovation and thus not authentically Islamic. The allegation that Sufis withdraw from political and social activity, relish music and consider it as a means to godliness is vehemently proposed by Wahabis, the diehard conservative Muslims, and their likes. A few more basic differences are:

The Sufis claim that the ways unto God are as numerous as the number of creatures in the world.

The Wahabis believe that the Prophet said: my path is straight, follow it and none else.

The Sufis believe that there is neither command nor prohibition in matters of faith.

They reject the doctrine of fear of God, the wrath of judgment day, the fury of hell's fire and promise of *Jannat*, the Heaven. According to them, faith based on coercion is slavery.

The Persian Sufi poet and philosopher Rumi (1207 c.e-1273 c.e) says:

I died a mineral and became a plant.
I died as a plant and became an animal.
I died as an animal and rose to be a man.

This is a view that could be abhorrent to a fundamentalist Muslim.

While going through the history of Islamic conversions in Kashmir, it is thus not difficult to imagine why many of the Muslims resorted to coercion, sword and arson to spread the

religion that Sufis wished to do, by acts of grace, love and understanding.

Rishis had a profound effect on Kashmiri society; they were the sons and daughters of soil and the masses understood them. Their honesty of purpose, inner purity of heart and actions, detachment with worldly pleasure and its riches, the true control of what Sufis called the *Nafas* changed the social climate of Kashmir. Never did they ask people to change their faith or mode of worship. Though not as well lettered as Sufis were, they had a frank and complex free attitude towards life and the world at large.

Lallishwari the Pandit lady and Sheikh ul Alam, the Nand rishi who was junior to Lallishwari by thirty years, were the great torch bearers of this school of thought which had a path-breaking influence on Kashmiri spirituality and social atmosphere.

Lallishwari- Lalded

Some say that she was born in 1326 (others put her date of birth in 1355). Born at Panderathan close by to Srinagar, she was married to a man living in Pampore. They say coming events cast their shadows and that seems to have been true in Lalded's case too who showed signs of wisdom of an exceptionally high order at a very early age and was born with a religious bent of mind. But nobody in her family seemed to have taken much note of all these traits.

The tortures suffered by this young married girl at the hands of her tyrannical mother- in -law, have become proverbial in every Kashmiri household.

The fact remains that she was denied even two square meals a day by her monstrous mother-in-law. It must not have come as a surprise to the people who knew her, when she renounced the world at the young age of 26 and left her home never to return. Tales about her *mastana* appearances, that she would move around naked, are a matter of folklore.

Though illiterate she would speak in riddles about the complexities of life and nature. The great Sheikh-ul-Alam developed a tremendous respect for her poetry and was an admirer of her intellect. She is said to have passed away while in Bijbara, but the date of her death is not known.

Sheikh-ul Alam- Hazrat Nur u din Nurani

Another great sage and poet who has left an indelible impression on the culture and spiritual legacy of Kashmir and woven a rich tapestry of Rishi literature, was Nurudin.

Also lovingly called Nand Rishi, who has come to be recognised as the living soul of Kashmiriyat and given the grand title of *Alam Bardar e Kashmir*- the flag bearer of Kashmir.

Born in the village of Kaimuh near Bijbara in 1377, according to a legend, the baby Nurudin refused to be breast fed, adding to the anxieties of his distraught parents. Legend, further, has it that Lalded who had by then become a famous rishi suddenly appeared on the doorstep of Salar Sanz, father of the new born and asked to be taken to where the mother, Sadra, was trying to breast feed her little child without any success.

Lalded is said to have taken the baby into her lap and whispering something to him put him to her breast. Lo and behold, the baby started sucking milk thereafter.

On growing up the boy showed signs of being a misfit everywhere though he was apprenticed to various different trades. At the age of thirty the young man renounced his home and the world. He retired to a cave and lived in the wilderness for 12 years.

Witnessing a great transformation of Kashmir from a predominantly Hindu society to a predominantly Muslim one, he produced works of spiritual philosophy both in prose and poetry.

His sayings had a tremendous impact on Kashmiri society. People loved him not only for his wisdom but also for his simple ways of life. The events of his lifetime are amply reflected in his works. Though he had a prolonged contact with Hamdani, the Muslim missionary from Iran, he never let his views and thoughts be influenced by anyone. Of course he used his poetry to impart religious teachings and influenced masses to accept Islam without tyranny. His knowledge was intuitive; he had never been educated formally. He breathed his last in 1438 when he was 63 years (In the reign of Sultan Zain ul Aabdin).

So great was Sheikh ul Alam's hold on masses that even much after his demise, in 1808, the Afghan governor had coins stamped in his honour ostensibly to win support of Kashmiris and popularise the hated Afghan rule.

Legend has it that some miscreants jealous of Sheikh ul Alam's popularity used the wiles of a seductress, Shingar *bibi*, to charm the *rishi* Sheikh ul Alam. The *rishi* cast a severe look at her and the poor woman turned into an ugly old hag. Her ego deflated, she became a disciple of Sheikh who ultimately healed her back to her normal looks.

His sayings have been preserved for the posterity by one Baba Nasiruddin. These include:

*Su chha Vachhan kabilas ta kaalas
Svachhan dil kis haalas kun
Zikir hak praz budith taalas
Dev raaz honur yi yi zaalas kun*

God does not give credit to debates and arguments
He rather judges the innermost intentions. Stop the
meaningless rhetoric and remember God, May be still He
might bless you.

*Keychan kabri chhi posh zan sherey
Keychan kabari chhu siyaah chaah
Kanya guyi sahibo chaaney werey
Kanya gayi zeri akis gumrah*

Some people will have their lush green graves decorated
with flowers Some will have their graves look like those of
dark dungeons Oh Master some have adopted your ways
And some went astray with just a little push.

Sheikh-ul-Alam was very concerned with nature conservation
even at that distant time when conservation of nature was
hardly a matter of public concern. He has many messages for
people to this effect; one of which is very relevant today:

Ann poshi- yeli wann poshi.

Food will last so long as the forests last!



(Left) Master Zind Kaul with D.N.Parimoo (Right)

Master Zind Kaul

Amongst the contemporary poet- saints, Master Zind Kaul stands the tallest. He got the prestigious Sahitya Academy award for his book ***Sumran***, meditation. A short poem of his when rendered in English would be something like:

"A spark on the haystack set the whole jungle ablaze, it spread fast and my liver got roasted and my heart burnt. Someday somewhere someone may have seen His shadow. We have heard Him loud and clear and are sure and relieved of His presence."

Masterji as he was known to his innumerable followers and friends was a man of very mild temperament though a man of high learning.

Shri Gopi Kishen also known as Gopi Kishna

I met Shri Gopi Kishen while he was working as head clerk in the office of the Director of Education. My first meeting with him in his office was unfortunately far from pleasant, as I had a tiff

with him regarding a personal problem. However soon he was amenable to reason and the matter was resolved satisfactorily.

Sometime later in 1945, he attended a feast at my house on the occasion of *kah nehtra* of my sons. We became very good friends. In 1948 he, along with Pt Shyam Lal Saraf started a social reform movement for Kashmiri Pandits, the Forum for Kashmiri Social Reforms.

As the President of this organisation, he wished that I function as its publicity secretary. My friends late Pt AN Raina, ex-advocate general J&K and Mohan ji Tickoo did try to dissuade me from accepting it because of their leftist leanings. They felt the organisation was rank communalist in character. But I had formed a good opinion of Pt Gopi Kishen and liked his captivating personality. I refused to be daunted by the jeering and sarcastic remarks of my closest friends. A lot can be written about Gopi Kishen's fervour for social reform as needed by Kashmir Pandit community.

It is his attainment of spiritual heights that amazed and impressed me.

It was in 1969 when I came over to Jammu that I happened to see Gopi Kishen ji by chance. We embraced each other like old friends and since I was staying in the same vicinity he invited me over to see him at 9 am whenever I wished or everyday if I could.

Since I was retired I thought it a blessing to be able to pass sometime in his company that always left me refreshed. It is in such meetings that he introduced me to a form of yoga called Kundalini Yoga. According to this yoga there is an imaginary serpentine coil residing in the lowest vertebra of a man. Through

constant practice of meditation, early before dawn and at dusk sitting in lotus posture, one can gradually make this *kundalini* rise higher and higher till it can reach the cerebrum.

At this stage the practitioner attains a state where he can travel mentally anywhere in the world, and talk any language of the world.

Once he invited me to watch this feat of his. I was perplexed to see his face blushing like a rose, his eyes wide open, a bit seemingly out of their normal position. We were alone the two of us in his yoga room. He started talking in German, then French and then Farsi. It amazed me and awed me beyond any description. Later I discovered that he had lots of disciples, some of them from far off countries.

He asked me to correct a book he had written in English, *The Kundalini Yoga* which I did to his satisfaction. I couldn't take up this yoga though he was kind enough to offer to train me. I soon shifted to Gwalior to stay there with my eldest son and lost contact with him till 1976 when I had again shifted to Mumbai.

I read in the *Blitz* weekly about Pt Gopi Kishen being in Mumbai, and without wasting any time I reached the house of Mr Karanjia the editor and owner of *Blitz* who was by now a good friend, as both of us had jointly started a campaign to expose the manipulations of a famous Mumbai builder. Mrs Karanjia took me to the guest room and, lo and behold, Gopi Kishenji was there in a snow white robe, his face radiating the brilliance and serenity I had not witnessed before. All the four of us had a long talk and next day Gopi Kishenji delivered a lecture on the subject of Kundalini Yoga at Shivaji Park, Dadar.

He passed away at the age of 81 in 1985. I understand there is a foundation continuing his work, with its headquarters in Germany.

Shrines

Kashmir is a land deeply steeped in spirituality and so it is natural that it has more than the normal share of shrines: Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist.

Buddhist shrines are now confined to Ladakh and Kargil districts which have already been described in Chapters 5 and 7. There are no Buddhist shrines left in Kashmir Valley, except some ruins around Harwan area of Srinagar.

Without including the very ancient places like Martand, where now only ruins stand, we have: Amarnath cave, Kheer Bhawani, Shankaracharya, Verinag, Mattan, Bhawan, Nagdandi, Deevi Bal, Reshi Maalu etc among Hindu shrines.

Shankaracharya temple, located at a picturesque hill top overlooking the Dal Lake is architecturally the most interesting Hindu temple of Kashmir.

Most of the Hindu shrines are very simple brick masonry buildings neither of ancient vintage nor of any awe inspiring beauty.

Amarnath cave believed to be Lord Shiva's abode is a very important pilgrimage centre for Hindus. Shiva is supposed to reside within the cavern in the form of an ice block resembling a *Linga*, a phallus. The annual journey to the sacred cave takes place around the fourth week of July and starts as a procession from Srinagar.

The number of participants is increasing every year thereby increasing the woes of state administration responsible for making the arrangements for safe and orderly conduct of the pilgrimage.

A visit along the pilgrim route now saddens many a heart who are concerned with the environmental preservation. Even the beautiful river of Liddar at Pahalgam on way to the cave, presents a sorry spectacle, where the stately massive rocks resting on the river bed have been grotesquely painted with slogans of various Godmen rivalling the cheapest marketing campaigns of cigarette and detergent manufactures. Gaudy paints make ugly paintings of the Hindu religious symbols like *swastika* and *omkar*. Will the nature lovers and conservationist of India take a look around here, rising above the petty communal politics, and ponder over the fate of this pristine beautiful area? If the crowds of pilgrims continue to grow as they have been during the last decade how long can we stall the threatened catastrophe of this environmentally sensitive area?

Should religion or a pilgrimage be allowed to denigrate into a license for wanton abuse of environment?

The cave is situated at an altitude of about 13,000 feet, the surrounding scenery described by some as of titanic splendour which, alas, now is in dire need of rational thought to prevent a titanic environmental blunder.

The cave is about fifty yards long and contains icicles and large blocks of ice in the surrounding rock clefts. The *lingam*, phallus shape, is considered to be a frozen spring by experts.

The crowds shout and chant prayers to Lord Shiva at the mouth of the cave. Rock pigeons said to be frequent denizens of the cave, are scared and get disturbed because of much shouting and noise; they rush out thereby signalling an answer to the prayers of believers.

It may be of interest to know that the existence of this cave was discovered and brought to public notice by a Muslim shepherd, one Mallick of Batakote village.

This family continues to get one-third the total value of pilgrim offerings made. However it is interesting to note a reference made about Amarnath in Kalhan's Raj Tarangini: "Gleaming like the ocean of milk a lake was constructed by (him) on a distant mountain, which in their way to the pilgrimage of Amarnatha, is visited by the people to this very day..." Taranga 1st..267.

The lake referred to is Sheshnag. It is quite likely the cave remained unvisited and thus forgotten by public at large and was brought into the notice again by the Mallick family of village Batakote.

Kheer Bawani - Tulla Mulla is possibly one of the oldest, if not the oldest of Kashmir's legacies. The mythological accounts associated with this temple at village Tulla Mulla strongly indicate an origin from prehistoric times when Nagas, an indigenous race of India were the major ethnic group inhabiting Kashmir.

Nagas were the early snake worshippers and mythical accounts credit a snake for having guided the early Brahmins to the spot. That would predate the arrival of Aryans from the plains in the south of Kashmir. This shrine finds a mention in Kalhan's Raj Tarangini, 850-880 AD.

The shrine consisting of a large, stone paved compound, with many stately *chinar* trees, has a unique septagon shaped spring as the central point of attraction.

A small but a beautiful temple rises gracefully from the water in the wider part of this spring, and it has a roofed structure. Just opposite the temple, a cover is provided for the praying Brahmins and the worshippers. This construction was made by Late Maharaja Pratap Singh sometime around 1912, presumably over the ruins of ancient temple. The real caretakers of this shrine during the last one decade or so have been the Muslims of village Tulla Mulla.

Popular belief has it that the spring changes its colour reflecting the fortunes of this land. Black is said to indicate times of mass misery, unrest and civil war; however so far I have not seen this for myself nor met any credible person who might have been an eyewitness to this account.

With the displacement of Kashmiri Pandit community, this shrine has become a cynosure of the Kashmiri diaspora worldwide. It will be worthwhile to appeal to all concerned with the preservation and maintenance of this shrine to stop pouring of milk, *kheer*, sugar and vegetable matter etc. into this spring. To assuage the feelings of devotees some alternate arrangement could be provided, where such offerings can be easily and usefully disposed. Let the present state of the once mighty and sacred river Ganga guide our leaders and public alike. A severe environmental threat is faced by this spring and it is the duty of every Pandit, nay, of every Kashmiri, to save this as also any spring which faces extinction by human ignorance or outright apathy.

The Muslim shrines of Kashmir generally are examples of well-laid architectural plans and monuments of praiseworthy aesthetic appeal.

Jama Masjid is probably the oldest of Kashmiri Islamic architectures. Said to have been first constructed in 1400 AD, it underwent large scale upgrading and renovation by the famous Sultan Zain ul Aabdin. The unique courtyard, surrounded by artistic pillars bestows individuality to this mosque.

Much of the original wood construction is destroyed but the reconstruction last undertaken by Maharaja Pratap Singh is no less attractive.

Shah Hamdan, also known as Khankahi Molla is a mosque built in 13th century on the bank of Jhelum. It lends a stately charm to the river front. It claims to have been the first notable mosque built in Kashmir. A small nondescript Kali temple is barely visible at the base of this mosque, lending belief to the widely held view that this mosque was built upon the site of an old temple. A low pyramidal roof at the top of the building is very distinct and looks like a crown set on the main building.

Patthar Masjid is yet another famous jewel of an architectural grandeur. This mosque was built in 1623 AD as per the orders of Empress Noor Jehan and follows the classical pattern of Mughal architecture.

Hazratbal, the immaculate modern white marble construction on west bank of Dal lake was started by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah in 1968 and completed by 1979. Originally constructed as a pleasure nest by a Mughal governor in early 17th century, it was turned into a place of godly worship by Emperor Shah Jahan when he visited Kashmir in 1634. The famous holy relic

of **Moi Muqadas** (the holy hair of Prophet Mohammad) was brought here in the reign of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.

This shrine commands a breathtaking view of Dal lake on one side and the rugged peaks on the other.

A mention has to be made of the **Charari Sharief** *ziarat* of Sheikh-ul-Alam, which unfortunately was gutted as a result of militant activities and the consequent military action. Though the *Ziarat* has been restored to the original grandeur, the treasure of old manuscripts and articles have been lost forever.

Conclusion:

At the crossroads....

Last decade or so will go down as the bloodiest in the history of Kashmir. While hundreds of thousands Kashmiri Pandits scattered all over India lived a life of acute poverty in make-shift shanties under the scorching sun, multitudes of Muslims have been leading an equally miserable existence and living perpetually under the shadow of gun.

Loss of thousands of lives, expense of billions and travails of millions has failed to bring about stability and peace to the tormented State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Nationalistic greed, political ambitions and expediencies of the political and religious leaders of the entire subcontinent have not only devoured the resources of their respective countries but also caused inhuman sufferings to the people of Kashmir.

An end to the State's woes lies in substituting the policies of gun power and religious rhetoric by a policy based on creating and strengthening the democratic institutions, settlement of the displaced people and reinforcing or creating apparatus needed for maintenance of a secure, strong secular democracy.

History dictates that ultimately policy of reconstruction and peace only prevails.

The concepts of peace, tolerance, construction, and democracy are the cornerstones of *Kashmiriyat*. The will and determination of Kashmiris is a proven fact as is the intrinsic durability and distinct individuality of Kashmiri ethos.

The rishis, sufi saints and fakirs were deeply philosophical and worked with their minds, studying that which was produced long before their lifetime. They added and strengthened a culture which we proudly refer to as our *Kashmiriyat*.

Sadly the demons of destruction have once again been haunting our lands and worse still, the very fibre of our culture, molesting the memories of our saints like Sheikh-ul-Alam and Lalded.

This generation and the generations to come, owe it to their forefathers to reverse this retrograde trend and safeguard our unique culture and add to the wealth of knowledge already accumulated for the good of generations yet to come.

Not all the best is behind us nor is the coming worst unstoppable. The best of the past deserves to be remembered, studied and venerated but greater minds are sure to come, higher species of man is bound to evolve. That is the law of ongoing life and a prerequisite of a dynamic culture, essential for any culture to survive and thrive.

History is witness to the fact that many a culture and civilisation have perished when these lost their openness, when they were denied the life giving elixirs produced by its intellectuals and path breakers.

Lallishewari, perhaps moaned, for the present day condition of Kashmir voicing the anguished cry of many uprooted Kashmiris craving to go back to their homes:

*aami panna sadras naavi chhas lamaan
katyi bozi dai myon meti diyi taar
aamen taakyeen poni zan shamaan
zuv chhum bramaan ghara gatsch ha!*

I am pulling the boat of my life with the help of a weak
untwisted thread

Wish He hears my prayer and brings me safe across
(the waters)

My efforts are in vain ,just as water can't be stored in
raw clay pots

O God... I crave to be back to my home!

But we have the great Sufi saint Jalaluddin Rumi giving solace,
advising patience and reminding us about the ongoing process
of life:

Hamcho sabzah baarah royeeda am-Nou sado haftad
qalib deedha ham

***Like grass, have I disappeared and grown all over again
several times over,***

So far I had to change nine hundred and seventy forms.

Glossary

Many words of Kashmiri language or that of Urdu or Farsi and of Sanskrit have been used in the book, their nearest possible meanings are given hereunder:

Allakh Niranjan-Salutations to Niranjan, another name for Lord Shiva.

Achkan-a close necked, knee length coat.

Arti – the concluding performance of a Hindu ritual worship.

Arya Samaj-The highly motivated organisation for bringing religious and social reforms amongst Hindus.

Ashtami-Eighth day of every bright fortnight, very religious Pandits fast on this day and consider it a meatless day.

Aatish e Chinar- the self generated fire peculiar to the mighty big Chinar trees.

Barat- A procession of the bridegroom.

Bismillahu Rahman u Rahim-Muslims start doing anything with this salutation to Allah which means "with the name of Allah the most beneficent and the most merciful."

Bishtak- This legendary thief of Kashmir of late 19th century, who could never be arrested by the police; this character has given rise to many stories of Kashmiri folklore.

Brahmin Hatya-Murder of a Brahmin;it was considered the worst sin man could do.

Burza- the dried bark of Papyrus; before the introduction of paper it was used for writing manuscripts.

Biradari - a section of people with a common interest.

Chappas- the boat paddles.

Chhaddi Mubarak-The holy mace of Lord Shiva.

Chhakri -The ancient fast beat music of Kashmir.

Dum Aaloo-Potato dish peculiar to Kashmir; boiled peeled and deep fried potatoes are cooked in spicy gravy under pressure.

Darbar- the King's court.

Dak bungalow-Literally the mail house that could be used by travellers, specially the officials of state.

Dr KM Pannikkar, a famous Indian Historian, served as India's ambassador to China.

Dogras-The people of Jammu province considered a martial race. Their customs and language are quite distinct from those of Kashmir valley.

Draupadi and Pandavas- from the great Hindu epic Mahabharata; Pandavas were five brothers, persecuted by their royal cousins the Kauravas. The five brothers had vowed to share whatever came their way, and so it happened they won an archery competition and were thereby obliged to marry the princess Draupadi who ended having five husbands instead of one.

Dussa-A very costly long shawl made of the exotic fibre Pashmeen.

Ekadashi- the eleventh day of Pandit calendar observed as a fast.

Firan or Phiran-A long garment usually made of woollen cloth worn both by males as well as females as an outer garment, the design being slightly different for both.

Garam Masala-A powdered combination of 6-7 condiments used as spice for cooking.

GyavTakia- a fully stuffed rounded back rest cushion.

Gurit Meech-special clay found only at certain places,used for washing.

Gayatri Paath- An ancient Sanskrit hymn dating from Rig Veda times .

Gharachun- a formal dinner where the bridegroom and his very close relatives are invited to a grand dinner by the bride's parents. Now a days some families do it both ways. The groom's family invites the bride's people for the dinner.

Ghat- a wide approach to the river front. The wide steps leading to the river are well paved with stone.

Ghalib -the great romantic Urdu poet of mid nineteenth century, whose poetry continues to be popular even today, amongst the Urdu knowing people.

Gompa- a Buddhist hostel for worship and studies.

Haakh- a green leafy vegetable, a staple item of Kashmiri food. A very similar vegetable is grown in Kenya, and it is also a staple food of Kenyans.

Haji- a Muslim who has completed his Hajj pilgrimage.

Hamtul- The pole used by boatman for propelling boats.

Halqa committee- committee set up by the ruling National conference to monitor and look after the grievances of a particular cluster of houses in a residential area .

Herath- Kashmiri version of the famous Shivratri festival celebrating Lord Shiva's marriage.

Honchh- the period in a Pandit household where some event considered non pious(in the sense of causing pollution) has occurred, like childbirth or death.

Jenu- the thread ceremony for Brahmin boys when they are initiated into Brahminfold and readied to study ancient Vedas.

Kangri- the mobile charcoal heated device for warmth peculiar to Kashmir.

Kali – the Hindu Goddess of death.

Kashmiriyat- the ethos of Kashmir, the feeling of being distinct as a Kashmiri.

Khansama- a personal valet cum cook cum major domo employed by the British during their colonial heydays in India.

Khadi- cloth woven of hand spun yarn ,used as a political tool by Gandhi to cut down imports from Manchester, as also generate employment for the poor Indian masses. This

movement became a matter of faith amongst Indians and its effects led to closure of Manchester textile mills.

Khandani- a well bred man of a decent ,noble family.

Kehwa or mogal chai-tea usually made in a samovar, no milk is added, but some condiments are used for making it.

Lagan-is the ritual of Hindu marriage conducted by a priest whereby the marriage is formalized.

Mandli- is a small group of people having religion, caste or any hobby in common.

Matsch-mincemeat, cooked as small rolls in spicy gravy.

Manziraat(or mehendi raat)- the first day of celebration of a marriage or any other social function, usually accompanied by music and a dinner.

Mond- a derogatory way of calling a widow.

Mulla- Muslim cleric.

Mujahideen- the soldiers of Islamic Jihad.

Mushaira- a public gathering where poets recite their poems.

Namda-woollen felt of white colour embroidered on one side, used as a rug.

Nadir yakhni- lotus root pieces cooked in yoghurt, delicately spiced.

Nautch girls- the professional dancing girls..

Natoo- a terracotta pitcher with a narrow open end.

Nirmaal- the water and flower offering to the idol during the worship.

Nirvana- the Hindu concept of blessed piece attained by Yoga.

Nikah- the Muslim marriage ceremony presided by a Muslim cleric.

Paharis- a small ethnic group ,sharp featured highlanders.

Pakoda-diced vegetables, dipped in a spicy dough and deep fried, like the Japanese tempura.

Paneer- made by souring of milk and compressing the mass after removal of whey. This dish is very popular both in India as also Pakistan. It is wrongly described as cottage cheese.

Patwari- the grass root level revenue official.

Pandit (Abbr. Pt)- used as a prefix for Kashmiri Brahmins, *Pandit* meaning the learned one.

Phirni-the popular Kashmiri dessert made of milk, rice flour and sugar, served cold in small terracotta cups.

Poshipuja-the couple being married has to undergo this ceremony. Flower petals are showered on the couple.

Puja-the worship of God, generally involves use of flowers and burning of incense.

Pulhor-very ancient invention of footwear made of grass, favourite of poorer people

Qadiyani- a sect of Muslims believing in connection with Jesus (Details are given in the footnote to Chapter 4).

Racepah-The pony keepers and guides for the mountainous treks to Ladakh and Gilgit; their movements in the city proper were restricted by an unwritten law and they stayed on the outskirts of the city.

Rameshwari Nehru- a great social worker, sister-in-law of Mr Jawaharlal Nehru and mother of BK Nehru, who served as governor of various states and was India's ambassador to the USA.

Roganjosh- a Kashmiri mutton dish .It is made by frying mutton pieces and cooking them with hot spicy gravy.

Raouf-a group dance of Kashmiri ladies.

Roti-the unleavened bread generally made from wheat flour.

Rudraksha mala-Rudraksha beads are seeds of a very uncommon tree. The beads are usually made into a necklace (mala) and are supposed to have very benevolent effect on the wearer.

Saptarshi calendar-The ancient Kashmiri Calendar according to which the year 2009 corresponds to the year 5085, which means this calendar started 3075 years before Christ, very close to the Jewish calendar according to which the year 5085 corresponds to the year 5770 (Tammuz) .

Satraat - the evening after the marriage when both the groom and the bride go to her house for a lavish dinner.

Sarangi- a stringed musical instrument.

- Shamiana*- coarse cloth multi coloured large canopy supported by bamboo poles to give shade and shelter to a large gathering.
- Sharda*- the ancient university town, now under Pakistan, once a great learning centre for Buddhist and Hindu studies. *Sharda* is also the true script of Kashmiri language which evolved here.
- Shakarparas*- fried cookies made from whole meal flour.
- Shayar e Kashmir*- the poet of Kashmir, a state title bestowed posthumously, on Mahjoor.
- Sher e Kashmir*- Lion of Kashmir, the informal tittle given to Sheikh Abdullah.
- Sheer chai*- a salted tea with milk.
- Sitar*- long necked Indian musical stringed instrument.
- Singhara*- the water chestnuts.
- Tantrik* -a Hindu sect dedicated to worship of mother Goddess; has greatly influenced the Mahayana Buddhist thought.
- Talafuz*- the pronunciation, diction of Urdu speech.
- Tumbakhnar*- A musical instrument indigenous to Kashmir, made of terracotta.
- Thread ceremony*- see *Jenu* .
- Telvaroo* -a puffy small bread liberally sprinkled at the upper crust with sesame seeds.
- Tehsil*- an earlier designation of what we call a district now.

Tehsildar- the district officer and revenue collector of olden days.

Thali- a metallic plate, used for eating food.

Unani Hakim- is the physician practicing the ancient Greek system of medicine.

Vareyn- a self taught midwife.

Vanvun- the ancient Sanskrit/Sharda hymns sung in a long drawl on religious occasions.

Veeg Nachun- a slow dance performed by ladies around a bridegroom.

Wakf- all the mosques and their upkeep is managed by a *Wakf* trust, board.

Wagoov - the flooring made out of dried weed common in marshy areas of Kashmir.

Wular Raza - the presiding deity of the great lake Wular.

Yender- the hand driven spinning wheel.

Zaildar and Lambardar- the junior village level revenue officials.

Zuv jaan wandha...- the poet, Mahjoor, expresses his great sentimental attachment to India but quickly hastens to add that his logic favours Pakistan, a dilemma to the poet's mind (for being a Muslim?).

